PRESENTS

5 novelets by the creator of PERRY MASON and the best-selling American mystery writer of all time



Edited and with an Introduction by



1981 \$1.75 UK £1.15 CC.



3 EXTRA-SPECIALS BY ERIC AMBLER ROSS MACDONALD ED McBAIN 1 SHORT NOVEL BY HUGH PENTECOST

Ruth Rendell Edward D. Hoch Phyllis Bentley Lord Dunsany

PLUS 10 NOVELETS AND SHORT STORIES BY Michael Gilbert Robert L. Fish Lawrence Treat Lillian de la Torre

Ellery Queen and others

the WHO'S WHO of WHODUNITS

IT'S HERE!

THE **EXTRA** SPECIAL 20th Anniversary Edition of

FOA

Save \$7.05 over the hardcover

version!

EXTRA COUPON ON PAGE 190

Mail to: Ellerv Queen's Anthology, 380 Lexington Ave., NYC NY 10017

	Enclosed is \$2.90 (\$2.25 plus 65¢ handling/
g s	shipping) for my EQ Anthology #40
	(Fall/Winter '80 Edition).

Name. Address_

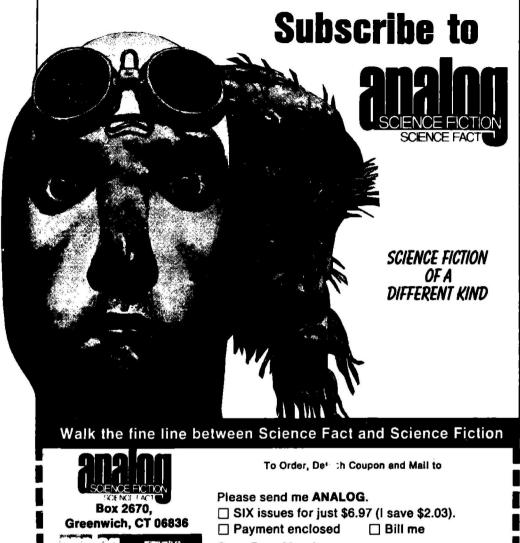
City_ Zip___ State___

What do you like best about a mystery?

	the challenge	of "whodunit"?	•
	creaking doo	rs and things tha	at go bump in
	steadily mou	nting suspense?	
		e macabrethe	
	the sudden to surprise endi	wist of plot and a	a quick
It's all here!	in ALFRED	TCHCO	CK'S
Enjoy a variety of chills and to 13 new spine tinglers in regular short stories and nedward D. Hoch, Jack Rit Tyre, John Lutz, Robert To	d challenges every mo n the Hitchcock tradition ovelettes by today's top tchie, William Bankier,	onth with up on. Get p authors— Nedra	MYSTERY MAGAZINE
And start with this money	-wise introductory offe	er! Ellic	HCOCKS
Special New Sul AHMM • Box 2640 • Green Send me AHMM at the rate of Special—6 issues at \$6.97! Double the value with 12 issues	nwich, CT 06836 hecked below.	A STEPPER	
☐ Payment of \$e ☐ Charge to my ☐ VISA		Outside U.S.A. and p. er. 6 issues—\$8.00 12 is	ossessions; ssues—\$16.00
Card #		Expiration Date:	·
Your Signature:(Only the 12 issues for \$13.9	94 offer can be charged to	your bank cards.)	
Your name			
Address			
City	State	-	in .

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first copy.



Greenwich, CT 06836

\$4.06

Save Even More!

- ☐ TWELVE issues for only \$13.94.
- ☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me

Charge is to my ☐ VISA Card ☐ Master Charge ☐ Card #

Signature _____Expiration Date_____
Name (please print) _____

Address ______State ____Zip____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.

H]AAP4

Erle Stanley Gardner

The Amazing Adventures of Lester Leith

ELLERY OUEEN PRESENTS ERLE STANLEY CARDNER'S THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LESTER LEITH

Edited and with an Introduction by **ELLERY QUEEN**

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC. 380 Lexington Avenue New York, New York 10017 Copyright © 1980 by Davis Publications, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 72-99895

The editors hereby make grateful acknowledgment to Mrs. Erle Stanley Gardner, to Thayer Hobson and Company, and to Lawrence Hughes for giving permission to reprint the material in this volume and for their generous cooperation.

- In Round Figures, copyright 1930 by Red Star News Co., renewed 1958 by Erle Stanley Gardner.
- The Bird in the Hand, copyright 1932 by Red Star News Co., renewed 1960 by Erle Stanley Gardner.
- A Thousand to One, copyright 1939 by Red Star News Co., renewed 1967 by Erle Stanley Gardner.
- The Exact Opposite, copyright 1941 by Red Star News Co., renewed 1969 by Erle Stanley Gardner.
- The Hand Is Quicker Than the Eye (original title Lester Leith, Magician), copyright 1939 by Red Star News Co., renewed 1967 by Erle Stanley Gardner.

First Printing: December 1980

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Introduction	Ellery Queen	9
In Round Figures		11
BIRD IN THE HAND		48
A Thousand to One		78
THE EXACT OPPOSITE		118
THE HAND IS QUICKER THAN THE EYE	9	153

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader:

Erle Stanley Gardner probably invented more series detectives and criminals than any other writer in the mystery field. Foremost. of course, is his lawyer-detective, Perry Mason, the best-selling fictional sleuth in the history of American publishing. Other Gardner creations include Señor Arnaz de Lobo, professional soldier of fortune: Sidney Zoom and his police dog; the suave and sinister Patent Leather Kid; the firm of Small, Weston & Burke; Ed Jenkins, the Phantom Crook (one of Gardner's personal favorites); Whispering Sands; Speed Dash, a human fly with a photographic memory (Gardner's earliest series character); Major Brane, freelance secret-service man: El Paisano, who could see in the dark: Larkin, a juggler who used only a billiard cue as his weapon; Black Barr, a two-gun Western avenger: Ken Corning, the slick lawyer who antedated Perry Mason; Hard Rock Hogan; Fong Dei; Crowder; Rapp; Skarle—all of whom appeared in pulp magazines and were followed by the hardcover-book protagonists. D.A. Douglas Selby, Bertha Cool and Donald Lam, Sheriff Bill Eldon, and, of course, the one and only Perry Mason.

Of the many wood-pulp characters the most popular undoubtedly was Lester Leith, the Robin Hood of detectives who solved baffling mysteries in order to crack down on cracksmen. Instead of robbing the rich to help the poor, Lester Leith robbed the crooks "of their ill-gotten spoils" and gave the proceeds to deserving charities—less "20 percent for costs of collection."

Lester Leith was, in Gardner's words, "a typical character of the pulps, and written for the pulps." He was light-fingered and light-ning-witted, a "dapper, ingenious chap" gifted with "sheer mental agility." So far as we have been able to check, Leith was born in print some time in 1929. During the next ten years Mr. Gardner wrote more than 60 novelets about his criminologist-criminal. After 1939 the debonair young clubman appeared less frequently—about

one dozen more exploits were added to the saga. So it can be estimated, with reasonable accuracy, that Lester Leith's larcenous career totaled approximately 75 adventures.

Now, the lean, languid Lester was no piker. He was seldom interested in picayune pirating. The mysteries which caught his fancy were usually loaded with loot. It would be entirely on the modest side to calculate his average "take" at \$100,000 per caper. This means that Leith's life of detection and crime "earned" him a cool gross of \$7,500,000 and an equally cool net of \$1,500,000. Not bad for a decade-plus of buccaneering in the depression years of the 1930s!

Lester Leith is pure nostalgia—and great fun. The plots are imaginative, sparkling, audacious. To paraphrase Anthony Boucher's statement about another American detective: "We envy anyone who here discovers the amazing Lester Leith for the first time."

ELLERY QUEEN

IN ROUND FIGURES

Lester Leith rolled over in bed and grinned at the ceiling. In the lazy flexing of his well-oiled muscles there was something of the litheness of a stretching panther.

The electric clock on the dresser marked the hour of ten-thirty.

Leith stretched forth a silk-sheathed arm and rang for his valet. Almost instantly a door swung upon silent hinges and a huge form made an awkward bow.

"You rang, sir?"

"My bath, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir."

The door closed as silently as it had opened. But the square-shouldered valet had oozed into the room between the opening and closing of the door. On ponderous tiptoes he set about the tasks of the morning. The bath water roared into the great tub. The clothes closet disclosed an assortment of expensive clothes, from which the heavy hands of the servant picked suitable garments.

Propped up in bed, smoking a cigarette, Lester Leith regarded the

man through lazy-lidded eyes.

"Scuttle, you remind me of something, but I can't quite place what it is. Do you suppose you could help?"

The coal-black eyes of the valet glinted into smoldering fires of antagonism. He half-turned his head so that Lester Leith might not surprise the expression of enmity on his face.

"No, sir. I've reminded you of so much, sir. First it was of a reincarnated pirate, and you disregarded my real name to call me Scuttle. Then—"

Leith held up a well manicured hand. "I have it, Scuttle!"

"Yes, sir?"

"A locomotive, Scuttle; a big, black, shiny, powerful locomotive, but running on rubber tires."

"On rubber tires!"

"Quite right, Scuttle. It's the way you have of oozing about the room."

The man straightened. The broad shoulders snapped back. For a quick half-instant the sweeping black mustache bristled with aggressiveness. Then the servant sighed.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. The bath is to be just a little warmer

than lukewarm, sir?"

"Quite."

The valet used the pretext to ease his huge body into the bathroom. He closed the door, turned, straightened, and the air of servility evaporated from his personality. His black, beady eyes glittered defiance. His hamlike hand knotted into a fist. For seconds he stood quivering with rage.

Lester Leith, lying back on the bunched pillows, chuckled softly and blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. It was as though he took a

fiendish delight in flicking this man on the raw.

The valet took a deep breath, regained control of himself, shut off the bath and oozed into the bedroom.

"The bath is ready, sir."

Lester Leith yawned, stretched, paused with one pajamaed leg thrust over the edge of the bed.

"Scuttle, how long's it been since we checked the crime clippings?"

A look of eagerness flashed over the heavy face of the giant servant.

"Some time, sir. There have been several interesting crimes recently."

"Crimes the police haven't been able to solve?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you think I'd be interested?"

"I know it, sir."

"Why?"

"Because of the very valuable loot which the police haven't been able to trace yet."

"Tut, tut, Scuttle, how often must I tell you that my interest in crime is purely academic? That's why I never make personal investigations. I only study the reports published in the newspapers. Scuttle, get out the clippings and I'll glance over them."

And Leith slipped from his pajamas and into the lukewarm tub while the valet opened a drawer and thumbed out an assortment of newspaper clippings dealing with various unsolved crimes. By the time Leith had rubbed himself into a glow, attired himself in faultless flannels, and poured coffee from the electric percolator, the valet had arranged the crime clippings and took up a recital in a husky monotone.

"There was the affair of Mrs. Maybern's diamonds, sir. Missing."

"Robbery?"

"Yes, sir; she had been at a night club, dancing with one of the most attractive . . ."

"Pass it, Scuttle. It's probably blackmail."

"Very well, sir. How about the Greenwell murder?"

"Motive, Scuttle?"

"Robbery and, perhaps, revenge."

"Pass it, Scuttle. Is there, by any chance, a crime with a dash of imagination, with a touch of the bizarre, Scuttle?"

The heavy thumb of the police spy ran through the clippings.

"There's one, sir, but it's a cold trail."

"Tut, tut, Scuttle. You mustn't get the idea I'm seeking to trail these criminals. My interest is purely academic. Let's have the cold trail."

"The Demarest reception, sir."

"Mrs. De Lee Demarest?"

"The same, sir."

"Her reception was quite an affair, Scuttle. Seems to me we received an elaborately engraved invitation, did we not? The body of the invitation was engraved, the name scrolled in by hand. Rather on the ornate side."

"Yes, sir. And you perhaps remember reading of what happened, sir? The gems, the cash, all looted clean—the most carefully planned robbery in the past five years, sir."

Lester Leith poured himself a fresh cup of coffee, creamed and sugared it, lit a fresh cigarette, and sat back in the chair. There was a flickering gleam of real interest in his eyes.

"I never read the newspapers, Scuttle. You should know that. The crime news is all that interests me, and I have you to clip that. But a robbery of that nature interests me. It's a wonder our zealous friend Sergeant Ackley didn't suspect me of the job. Being a society robbery, I presume his first thoughts would be of me. And I suppose the robbers were attired in evening clothes, Scuttle?"

Scuttle, the police spy, refrained from telling Leith that he had been suspected of having a hand in that affair, that all that prevented a severe grueling at headquarters was that the police spies could account for every minute of Leith's time on the day in question.

"No, sir, they were not in evening clothes. In fact, it's quite a story."

"Tell it to me, Scuttle."

"It began with a Mrs. Pensonboy Forster--"

"What a ponderous name, Scuttle! She sounds like a mountain of respectability. One feels instantly that one should know Mrs. Pensonboy Forster, yet I don't remember having heard of her."

"Yes, sir," agreed the valet. "That's the very point. It was the name that enabled her to get into the reception."

"Tell me, Scuttle, was she fat?"

"Was she fat? Why, the woman was a mountain! She weighed three hundred and fifty pounds if she weighed an ounce. And she had a cold, fishy eye that sent chills through everyone she looked at."

Lester Leith pushed back the empty coffee cup, blew a smoke ring. "Scuttle, I am going to like this case. Tell me more."

"Well, sir, you remember the elaborate invitations. They were printed by Garland. That is, the engraving was done by him. The names were lettered in by some artist that Mrs. De Lee Demarest secured. I understand he charged two thousand dollars."

"Never mind the charge, Scuttle. Mrs. Demarest has plenty of money. Give me the facts."

"Well, sir, the invitations were most distinctive. Each guest had one, and the invitation was in the form of a card, to be presented at the entrance. This Mrs. Pensonboy Forster drove up in a magnificent car, was assisted to the ground, sailed up the stairs, and presented an invitation. The police have it now, sir. It seems to be most regular in form, but the lettering of the name shows little distinctive mannerisms which prove it was not done by the artist engaged by Mrs. Demarest."

"In other words, Scuttle, the invitation was a forgery."

"Precisely so, sir. But the woman who presented it was so substantial, so portly, so—er—so fat, sir, that she was admitted without too close a scrutiny of the invitation."

"But how could a three-hundred-and-fifty-pound woman pull a holdup and get away with it? Her escape, Scuttle, would be quite a problem, even for a resourceful brain."

"She fainted, sir."

"Fainted!"

"Yes, sir. And, of course, there's the key to the whole scheme."

"What are you talking about?"

"The fat woman fainted, and fell downstairs, from the top to the very bottom, sir."

Lester Leith sighed. "What then?"

"Well, sir, you see the reception was in the nature of an announcement party. The daughter of Mrs. Demarest had been married in Europe, and the marriage was kept secret. There was quite a romance."

Lester Leith sighed again, patiently.

The valet flushed.

"It all fits together, if you'll just listen, sir. The marriage was performed in Europe. It was announced at the reception, given in honor of the husband. And there were presents displayed, sir. They were grouped in one of the front rooms and two detectives were employed to watch them. And, of course, the guests wore plenty of gems, sir.

"Therefore, when the woman fainted and fell downstairs, she fell right into the front room where the detectives were guarding the presents. They tried to lift her onto a couch, sir... but three hundred and fifty pounds! They just couldn't do it. She was a mountain of flesh, and she groaned frightfully.

"Then there was the clanging of an ambulance gong. Of course, everyone thought one of the other guests had summoned the ambulance, sir. It came to the curb with a big sign on the side: Proctor & Peabody—Emergency Ambulance. You know the type of car, sir. But on this one the sign was so big it was almost an advertisement."

Lester Leith nodded.

"They carried this fat woman away in the ambulance, Scuttle?" The valet shook his head.

"Three stretcher bearers, all clad in white, came into the room. They tried to lift the woman and failed, and they sent out for the driver."

"Then what?"

"Then it happened, sir. The guests were all bunched together. The detectives were bending over the woman, trying to get her on the stretcher. The ambulance men were at very strategic positions. Then the woman sat upright and conked the detectives on the bean!"

"Conked, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. That is, tapped them with a heavy object. In this case it was the barrel of a gun. The detectives went to the mat, sir, and the woman swung the business end of the gun toward the guests. The ambulance men got guns out and herded the guests against the wall. They piled all the jewelry and cash on the stretcher, took the most expensive of the gifts, piled them on the stretcher, loaded the stretcher in the ambulance and all drove away."

Lester Leith sighed, a long drawn sigh of utter satisfaction.

"Scuttle, it is perfect!"

"Yes, sir. The loot was worth two hundred thousand—perhaps more."

Lester Leith nodded. "Yes, indeed, Scuttle. It would be. Of course, the success of the whole scheme depended on the fat woman. They couldn't lift her. They couldn't do a thing with her. And a fat woman who has fainted is such an awkward thing to handle. A gentleman is supposed to scoop the delicate form of a lady into iron-muscled arms and convey her to a couch. But in this case it would take a block and tackle."

The valet nodded.

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle. It was artistic. I presume they telephoned

the police at once, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir, and that's the peculiar part of it, sir. You see the ambulance was distinctive. It couldn't have escaped discovery, sir. It had the sign painted right on its side—a very large sign, almost distastefully large. The police realized at once that the ambulance was the point they should concentrate on. They dispatched police cars to form a cordon about the district; but no ambulance left the district. That's why the police feel certain the ambulance drove into a nearby garage."

Lester Leith nodded. "The police, of course, telephoned Proctor & Peabody—to find out if an ambulance had been stolen?"

"Naturally."

"And found out that none had. The ambulance was a complete imitation all the way through. Right?"

"How did you guess that, sir?"

"Simple, Scuttle. It's as simple as the solution to the whole affair. The police simply failed to see the obvious thing, Scuttle."

The valet teetered back and forth on his large feet.

"You mean to say you have deduced a solution to the crime—that is, a knowledge of the identity of the parties who are guilty—from a mere recital of the facts?"

Leith shrugged his shoulders.

"Let us say, a tentative solution, Scuttle. Now, for instance, the social secretary of Mrs. Demarest?"

"Was instantly suspected of complicity, sir. She was taken to headquarters and grilled. It appears that she had been very careless with the engraved invitations. She'd shown them to several people in advance of mailing, although she had been instructed not to do so. And the list of engraved invitations sent out and those remaining in her hands didn't tally. There were two unaccounted for. She said she had spilled ink on them and destroyed them, but didn't tell Mrs. Demarest. She got the artist to fix new ones." Leith nodded again.

"You think it's the social secretary who's guilty?" asked the undercover man. "The police do. They've let her out, but they're shadowing her."

Lester Leith pursed his lips, blew a smoke ring, traced its perimeter with a well-manicured forefinger.

"Tell me, Scuttle. This social secretary. Is she very thin, perhaps?"

"No, sir. She's rather inclined to beauty of figure, sir. She has wonderful curves, and her eyes are quite expressive. She's the sort of a girl the newspapers like to photograph. Her name is Louise Huntington. There's her picture, sir."

Lester Leith stared at the newspaper picture of a beautiful girl. The face was smiling, happy. The well-turned limbs were crossed in such a manner as to show a tantalizing expanse of silken hose.

"Taken before the accusation?"

"So I believe, sir. I understand she was all broken up over the affair. She seems to think she'll never be able to get another position."

"Mrs. Demarest discharged her?"

"Of course, sir. She would, you know."

"Yes, indeed, Scuttle, she would."

"Was there anything else about the crime you wished to know, sir?"

Lester Leith did not answer for several minutes. He blew a succession of smoke rings.

"No," he said, at length, "nothing else," and then he chuckled.

"Something amuses you, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle."

"May I ask what it is, sir?"

"Yes, indeed. I was thinking how perfectly ludicrous you would seem teaching a fat woman how to faint."

The valet's mouth opened and closed several times before his tongue got traction on the words that he sought to utter.

"Me! Teaching a fat woman how to faint! Good lord, sir, what an idea!"

"It is an idea, isn't it, Scuttle? Do you know, I think I should get a deep mattress to place on the floor. Then I'd have her fall over there in the corner."

"But . . . but . . . sir . . . I don't understand. Who is this fat woman, and where do we get her?"

"Ah, Scuttle, there you've placed your finger upon the point I

wished to discuss. We advertise for her, of course. I would suggest a more mature woman, one who is about forty years of age, Scuttle. Experience has taught me that women of that age have adjusted themselves to the wear and tear of life. In short, Scuttle, such a woman would be much more likely to wear tights."

"Wear tights, sir!"

"Precisely. I would suggest green tights particularly if you are able to get a blonde. The advertisement should be worded something like this:

"WANTED: Fair, Fat, and Forty. Good-Natured Woman Who Weighs at Least Three Hundred and Fifty Pounds. Should Know Something About Horses."

"Know something about horses! Have you gone stark, raving crazy, sir?"

"I think not, Scuttle. Evidently you have failed to consider certain elements of the Demarest robbery."

"Yes, sir. Such as?"

"Such as the fact that a woman who weighs three hundred and fifty pounds and deliberately falls downstairs, knowing in advance she won't be hurt, must have had some circus or stage training. Then, when you add the fact that she is rather handy with a gun... well, Scuttle, the answer is obvious. She has probably done work with a Wild West show."

"I'm not sure I follow you, sir."

"She fainted and fell, Scuttle. Yet they all knew—that is, those on the inside of the scheme—that she wouldn't be hurt."

"How do you reason that, sir?"

"Because the conking of the detectives was an important part of the scheme. The reasonable time to conk them was when they were bending over to assist the lady to a stretcher, and the person who could most effectively start the conking process was the woman herself."

The police spy stroked his mustache with what was intended to be a thoughtfully meditative gesture. But his washboarded forehead and twisted lips gave evidence of deep perplexity.

"And you want to put in an advertisement, get a fat woman?"

"Precisely."

"Because you think the same woman might answer the ad?" Lester Leith shrugged his shoulders.

The valet pressed the point.

"Yet that's why you mentioned horses. A circus woman would know horses. You must admit that."

Lester Leith smiled. "Skip along, Scuttle, and insert that want ad. We should start getting replies almost at once."

"But what's the idea of teaching her how to faint?"

"That, Scuttle, is one of the things I must keep absolutely secret. It's between the lady and myself."

"But you don't even know who she is yet . . . Is it that you want to see from the way she acts if she's accustomed to faint? Is that it? A trap?"

Lester Leith glanced at his watch.

"Do you know, Scuttle, there are times when your reasoning powers absolutely surprise me?"

The valet flushed. "Is that so, sir?"

"Absolutely," remarked Lester Leith in a tone of finality. "And, may I add, Scuttle, that this is not one of those times."

Scuttle inserted the ad, but not until he had made an appointment with Sergeant Ackley. Scuttle, known as Beaver on the force, walked from the newspaper offices to find the sergeant, parked in his official red roadster, waiting for him.

"Well, Beaver, you got him working on that Demarest affair. That's fine! We'll tail along and let him lead us to the culprits, if he solves the crime. And then we'll nab both him and them. If he misses fire, nothing will be lost."

Beaver grunted.

"I got him started all right; but no one knows where he'll finish. He gets my goat with his Scuttling me this and his Scuttling me that."

"There, there, Beaver," soothed Ackley. "It won't be but a short time more and then we'll have the goods on him. When we do, you can start in working him over. I promise you fifteen minutes alone in the cell with him. If he resists an officer that'll just be too bad."

"There won't be enough left of him to arraign in court."

Ackley nodded.

"Now tell me about the set-up," he said, fitting a cigar to his lips with that perfect precision which characterizes a man who is about to enjoy some very welcome information.

"Well, I did just as you told me. When he called for the crime clippings I spoke of a couple of things I knew he wouldn't be interested in, then I pulled that Demarest affair and he fell for it right away. He's got an idea that's very logical, too.

"He says the fat woman had to be a tumbler from a circus, probably a Wild West show, and he pointed out reasons that are ironclad. Then he wants me to insert an ad for a fat woman of about the age of this Mrs. Pensonboy Forster. He says I've got to teach her how to faint."

Sergeant Ackley's lips snapped the cigar to an abrupt angle.

"Teach her how to faint!" he exclaimed through clenched teeth.
"What does he want to do that for?"

The undercover man assumed an air of sophisticated wisdom.

"Tut, tut, sergeant. It's simple."

Sergeant Ackley's big hand ripped the cigar from his mouth. He hurled it to the pavement with such force that the wrapper cracked into fragments.

"Where do you get that tut-tut stuff? And what gave you the idea you can drool over me with that air of superiority Leith puts on? Have you been battin' around him so long you think you're one of those masterminds? Because, if you have, I'll bust you so flat you'll make wrapping for a picnic sandwich, you bull-necked, fat-headed, cinder-eyed—"

Beaver made haste to mollify the sergeant.

"No, no. I didn't mean it that way. You got your nerves worked up. What I meant to say was that I've put two and two together from workin' with him so long. Gimme a chance to explain, will you?"

The sergeant took another cigar from his pocket.

"Well, get busy," he growled. "You tut-tut me again and you'll go back to pavements."

"Yes, sergeant, but remember I've lived with that drawling stuff so long I can't help using some of it. It's unconscious... but let's look at the case. I gotta be gettin' back. He'll have more fool things for me to do.

"You see, he figures that one of the fat women who answers his ad will be either someone who has had circus experience, or, perhaps, the very one who pulled the faint on the Demarest job."

Sergeant Ackley's lip curled.

"What a boob you are, Beaver. It ain't nothing like that at all. In the first place, they made a good haul on the Demarest job. The woman who pulled that stunt is sittin' pretty right now. She's out of the picture, and as for finding anybody who'd know her and squeal, that's foolish. If any of the profesh knew her they'd have tipped us off by this time. "No. It's something else, something deeper. I have an idea he's going to lift the idea and train this fat dame to pull the same stunt for him. It's just the sort of a stunt he'd have thought up. Wonder is that he didn't. Maybe he was back of it all the time."

The spy shook his head. "I'll keep you posted. But it's some funny scheme. Remember, he don't ever rob anybody except thieves. I wish to thunder he'd tip his hand just once! Too bad he smelled out that dictograph we had planted—makes it hard for me to report. But I'll keep you in touch with the situation. How about planting a woman to answer his ad?"

"No. There ain't a woman in the department who could answer the description. All of our lures are the vamping type."

Lester Leith was up early the next morning to receive applications for the position mentioned in his want ad. There were six of them, no more. Some of them were, perhaps, in the three-hundred-pound class, but there were only two who seemed to come anywhere near three hundred and fifty pounds.

Leith made his selection with a judgment that was almost intuitive. He jabbed his forefinger at a woman who stood in a corner.

"Name?"

"Sadie Crane."

"Come in," he said.

The woman was about forty. She weighed well into the three hundreds, yet there was about her a certain feminine attraction. Her figure was wadded with fat, yet gave the suggestion of curves. Her eyes were bright. Her flabby lips twisted in a perpetual smile.

"Side show?" she asked, as soon as she had entered the room where Lester Leith indicated a specially constructed armchair.

The police spy, hovering near the doorway, listened intently.

"Not exactly a side show. You've been in one?"

"Sure. When I started putting on fat I dieted for a while. After I passed two hundred pounds I decided I'd better go the other way and make some money out of it. So I made up for lost time on the sweets... and here I am. Been in side shows from Keokuk to breakfast and back."

"Married?"

She shook her head. A tender light came in her eyes. "Widow. I married the Human Skeleton out of Selig's Super Shows. He was at Denver. Poor Jim, he caught cold the second week we'd been married, and he went quick."

Lester Leith bowed his head gravely, silent comment upon the match-like man who had been the love of this mountain of flesh.

"You'd wear tights?"

"No."

Lester Leith gravely regarded the tip of a smoldering cigarette.

"Perhaps your modesty—"

"Modesty, heck!" she interrupted. "It ain't modesty. I've showed my figure from Maine to California, from Mexico to Canada, and I've showed more skin area than any other woman in the world. I'll wear some professional clothes I've got, a jacket and shorts. That's the way I used to sit in the side shows. That's the way I'm willing to work."

Lester Leith nodded.

"That is reasonable. The salary will be twenty-five dollars a day. You will have to learn how to faint."

The fat woman leaned over and looked at Leith earnestly. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Fainting. You'll have to learn to drop over to one side, or flat on your back in a faint. You'll have to learn to take the fall without hurting yourself. We'll have mattresses and sofa pillows to break the fall at first. Later on we'll gradually take them away and you can fall on the floor."

She sighed. "Living around a side show for fifteen years, I've naturally seen lots of freaks—but you're a new type."

"But you're willing?"

"Sure, I'm willing. Only I don't want to take any exercise that's going to get rid of any fat. This fat is my stock in trade. At my present weight I'm an attraction. If I should drop a hundred pounds or so I wouldn't be anything but a fat mommer."

Lester Leith motioned to the valet.

"Will you please explain to the other applicants that their services are not wanted, Scuttle? And you'd better get their names and addresses. That will make them feel better. Tell them the position is temporarily filled."

The valet nodded, took pencil and paper, and oozed through the door.

Lester Leith glanced significantly at the grinning fat girl who reclined in the specially constructed chair.

"You can keep your mouth shut?"

"Like a clam."

"Now is a good time to begin."

"From now on, Mr. Leith, you don't hear anything out of me except clam-talk."

Leith reached for a checkbook. "I will advance your salary for the first week." He wrote and signed a check.

"You'll be expected to be available at all times. And I'd prefer to have you keep off the streets. So I've arranged to rent the adjoining apartment. It's all furnished, ready for you to move in. Your living expenses are, of course, to be paid by me."

The fat hand folded along the tinted oblong of paper. The twinkling eyes regarded the figures.

"Two hundred and fifty bucks!"

Lester Leith nodded. "I like round figures."

She caught the point, stretched out her legs and let her eyes drift over her form.

"When that guy with the mustache comes back, get him to give me a pull, and I'll get out of this chair an' go look the apartment over. Better order two quarts of whipping cream and lots of candy. I drink pure cream. Seems to agree with my stomach. The candy I eat for a pick-up. A fat person has lots of body to keep fed."

The door opened. The valet appeared with a list of addresses.

"Got them all, Scuttle?"

"All five of them, sir."

"Pass them over. And you might help Mrs. Crane out of the chair."

The undercover man approached the chair, heaved and tugged. Slowly the inertia of the thickly folded flesh was overcome and the woman got her thick legs under the fat body. Her eyes and lips were smiling.

"Cheer up, big boy, you're goin' to have lots of this to do."

"Show Mrs. Crane into the adjoining apartment, Scuttle—and arrange to have half a gallon of whipping cream delivered every day. And order a twenty-five pound case of assorted chocolates."

"Yes, sir."

"And then I'll want a social secretary, Scuttle. I think I'll go into the side-show business—not in a commercial way, but as a social activity."

"That'll be great," beamed Sadie Crane. "Gimme a week an' I can put on twenty pounds. It'll seem good to get back into the game. You goin' to get a human skeleton?"

"Perhaps. Have you any suggestions?"

"I'd like to help pick 'm. Poor Jim was sort of sandy complexioned. If you could find another like him—"

Lester Leith nodded. "You shall have the sole selection."

The woman waddled slowly from the room.

The valet escorted her to the corridor. As he closed the door and indicated her apartment entrance, he leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"Find out just what he wanted?"

The fat woman's lips mouthed a succession of words, but no sound came from the throat.

The police spy puckered his forehead.

"Huh?" he said.

The puffy lips again went through the motions of speaking—silent words that conveyed no intelligence.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

She gurgled a laugh that rippled the folds of her loose garments. "Clam-talk," she said.

And with ponderous dignity she opened the door of the apartment and side-swayed herself through the entrance.

Lester Leith, stretched before the wide open windows, listened to the distant voice of the city as it droned through the hot afternoon.

"I think, Scuttle, that we'll give Miss Louise Huntington a position. I regard her discharge as being rather an unwarranted act on the part of Mrs. De Lee Demarest. The salary, Scuttle, will be twice her former one. I have asked her to call, in a telegram which I dispatched in your absence."

The valet gulped.

"Think she can tell you anything about the robbery?"

Lester Leith regarded the man with cold eyes.

"I should hardly ask her, Scuttle. There's a knock at the door. You might answer it. I believe Miss Huntington is answering the telegram in person."

The police spy regarded his employer with smoldering eyes.

"You've got some clue on that Demarest affair. I believe that slick mind of yours has doped out a solution. You're just sittin' back an' laughin' at the police, and getting ready to hijack the swag—"

"The door, Scuttle!"

The big valet caught himself, gulped, turned and pussyfooted to the outer door.

"Mr. Lester Leith?" asked a remarkably sweet voice.

Lester Leith himself came to the entrance hall and greeted the young woman.

"Miss Huntington?"

"Yes. I received your telegram. I'd like a position most awfully right now, but it's only fair to tell you the police are hounding my footsteps. There was even a shadow following me here."

She was beautiful, both of face and figure, but there was a sad-

eyed expression to the face which spoke of recent worries.

Lester Leith smiled. "Please sit down. A police shadow is rather annoying, but not the least bit of an impediment to such activities as you'd have in my employ. Tell me, do you know anything about side shows?"

"Side shows?"

"Yes."

"My gracious! No!"

"That's fine. I always like a social secretary to start with no preconceived notions. Have you, perhaps, a good memory for names?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you recall the names of the invited guests to Mrs. De Lee Demarest's reception?"

"I think so."

"That will be fine. I'd like to have engraved announcements of the side show sent to the same list of names—and there'll be some cards to have printed. Fattest Human in the World. And Skelo, the Human Match. You understand, Miss Huntington, that the side show would be educational, but quite entertaining. And then I'd want to exhibit the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city."

The late social secretary of Mrs. De Lee Demarest regarded Lester Leith with eyes that were pools of suspicion.

"Are you trying to kid me?"

"No. I am serious."

"Is this job on the level?"

"You are to be the sole judge of that. I shall give you a week's salary in advance. You may quit at any time."

The girl settled back in the chair and crossed her knees in the position in which the newspaper photographer had snapped her. She was beautiful, judged by any standards, and something about Lester Leith's tone caused the sadness of her eyes to vanish into a twinkle of humor.

"If you're on the up-and-up I'm going to like this job," she said. "Maybe, after you get to know me better, you'll tell me what it's about."

Leith nodded gravely.

"I am telling you now. I think the Garland Printery will do excellent work on the invitations."

The police spy bent forward, his eyes lighting up.

"The same company that engraved the Demarest invitations!" he blurted.

"The same, Scuttle. Miss Huntington, does the Garland Printery do hand lettering as well as printing and engraving?"

The girl was studying his eyes with eyes that were singularly searching.

"So I understand."

"Very well. You might get in touch with Mr. Garland. You placed your order with him personally in the Demarest affair?"

She nodded assent.

"Your salary is twice what it was in your former position. I'd like to have you take one of the vacant apartments in this building, so you'll be available. I have already made arrangements with the owner. The rent is paid. It's only necessary to select your apartment."

Her voice was tonelessly level.

"There'll be only one key?"

Lester Leith smiled. "At the end of a week you may know me better."

The puzzled eyes swept his face.

"That still won't be very well—a side show, a human skeleton, a fat woman, the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city—are you crazy?"

And then something in the lazy drawl of Lester Leith's voice and in the idea of a side show brought laughter to the lips of the girl.

"I think," she said at length, "I'm beginning to get the idea."

A hot week of dreary monotony passed.

Sadie Crane, attired in vivid silk shorts and a scanty jacket, practiced fainting. She did it with perspiring good nature, the valet looking on, tugging at her arms as she arose from each fall.

Double mattresses were placed in the corner to cushion her falls. The eager eyes of the valet followed her every motion.

Louise Huntington tapped at a typewriter, addressing envelopes. Lester Leith came and went, his comings marked by casual comments of appreciation, his goings marked by police surveillance.

The police found out nothing. The strange routine of the apartment proceeded uninterrupted. The human skeleton, picked by Mrs. Crane, flitted in and out, surveying the tumbling performance with

mournful eyes. He spent his evenings squiring the fat woman. Between the two was a fast friendship. He was a chronic pessimist. The woman preserved the unruffled calm of a jovial disposition and an indestructible optimism.

The mattresses became dented with deep furrows where the falling body banged itself a dozen times an hour. The face of the valet became haggard. His surreptitious reports to Sergeant Ackley were interspersed with querulous complaint.

The woman achieved skill at falling sidewise, rolling on her back, straightening her muscles and becoming rigid, an immovable mountain of flesh.

"Will you tell me why you're doing that?" asked Arthur Spinner, the human skeleton.

She turned toward him a flushed face on which the sweat had left shining streaks. The clacking of the typewriter in the corner abruptly ceased, proof of the interest of Miss Huntington in the question. Scuttle paused with a handkerchief halfway to his forehead, his ears attuned for the reply.

The fleshy throat convulsed with muscular effort. The smiling fat lips mouthed a silent reply.

"More clam-talk!" rasped the human skeleton.

Sadie Crane laughed. The tapping fingers of the social secretary once more sought the keys, and Scuttle groaned.

It was at that moment that Lester Leith inserted his latchkey, entered the apartment, and surveyed the strange assortment of humanity. His eyes were glinting. In his right hand he carried a black bag.

"Ladeez and gentilllemen!" he intoned. "Step forward and observe the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city. Note the purity and fire of the stones. Note the wonderful workmanship of the clasp. Observe one hundred thousand dollars in scintillating, sparkling, coruscating gleams of imprisoned fire!"

The two freaks crowded forward. The police spy raised himself so that his coal-black eyes could gaze over the heads of the others. Louise Huntington regarded the opened bag with open mouth and wide eyes.

The black bag lay wide open. White cotton backed a necklace which seemed to snatch pure fires from the air and send them out in glittering brilliance.

It was Louise Huntington who broke the silence.

"I'm quitting my job," she said.

Lester Leith arched his eyebrows.

"Personal reasons, or anything that might be remedied by an increase in salary?"

"Personal. If anything should happen to that necklace, I'd go to jail for the rest of my life. The police suspect me of one robbery already—and, of course, there's the added fact that you're as mad as a March hare."

Leith indicated an inner room where he had fitted up a combined den and study.

"Perhaps," he said gravely, "the time has come for us to talk," and he led the girl into the room, and closed the door.

There ensued nothing save the rumble of cautious tones. Scuttle's ear, plastered against the doorknob, heard nothing. Yet the effect of that conversation was magical.

The girl came from the room, smiling, vivacious. She went back to her typewriter with eager fingers. From time to time she glanced at Lester Leith as he busied himself with hat, coat, and stick. The moment Leith slammed the corridor doors, the valet pounced upon the typewriting girl.

"What . . . "

She kept her fingers busy on the machine. Her smiling lips parted in a most tantalizing manner, and then she began to form words which carried no sound.

The valet scowled in anger.

"Clam-talk," said the girl, and lowered her eyes to the work in the machine.

The rippling laugh that floated across the room came from Sadie Crane, the "fattest woman in the world."

Two days later the valet spy took it upon himself to question Lester Leith.

"The fat woman faints almost perfectly. I've eliminated the mattress, sir, and she makes—er—perfect landings."

"Very good, Scuttle."

"And what, may I ask, sir, is holding up our—er—circus side show?"

Lester regarded him with judicial gravity, then lowered his voice.

"Scuttle, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, sir."

"Promise?"

"On my word of honor, sir."

"Very well, Scuttle, I am waiting for another ambulance robbery."

"Another ambulance robbery!"

"Precisely. You see, Scuttle, if my theory is correct, there will be another robbery within a few days in which an ambulance will figure. The ambulance will bear a large sign painted upon it, identifying it with Proctor & Peabody. It will make the ambulance so distinctive that it will seem impossible for it to vanish.

"Acting upon that theory, the police will comb the neighborhood in a house-to-house, garage-to-garage canvass. And that's all the good their search will do. The ambulance will have vanished as completely as though it had never existed."

"And then?"

"Then, Scuttle, we'll have our circus side show."

And Lester Leith, possessing himself of a polished cane, hat, and gloves, strolled out for an afternoon constitutional in the park.

The valet, after taking due precautions against being followed, oozed to a drugstore, telephoned Sergeant Ackley, and arranged for an appointment in an out-of-the-way parking station. Here he crawled into the red roadster and unburdened himself of many conjectures, reports, surmises, and facts.

Sergeant Ackley mouthed a cigar with a tempo which gradually increased until he whipped a damp newspaper from the rear of the car. "Haven't seen the *Record*, have you, Beaver?"

"No, why?"

Sergeant Ackley handed it over. Across the top of the front page was a screaming headline.

Phantom Ambulance Again Figures in Crime.

"Good gosh!" ejaculated the spy. "How did he dope that out?"

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were narrowed. He spoke with the manner of one who weighs his words carefully.

"He's smarter than the devil, Beaver—there's no getting around that. From the very first time you told him about the Demarest robbery he knew the answer. You can gamble on that. He wouldn't have tied up all that money in the preparation he's making if he hadn't been certain.

"Every time he's worked on a case, he's been able to get something from the newspaper clippings that the police missed completely. I've tried to figure out what it could be this time, but it beats me."

Beaver grunted.

"Well, I've still got the original clippings. I'll sit up tonight and study 'em. And I'll study the account of this last robbery in the *Record*. Maybe I can find out what he had in his mind."

"Think you're brighter than I am, eh, Beaver?"

"No. It ain't that. It's just that I thought maybe—"

"Well, forget it. I've covered that ground thoroughly. But we'll do one thing. We'll start shadowing this guy as though he was studded with diamonds in platinum settings. Eventually he'll lead us to the chaps we want. Then, maybe, we'll hook them for robbery and him for hijacking."

Beaver nodded slowly.

"And there's just a chance I can pump some information out of him. He's been acting sort of confidential lately. Gimme that paper and I'm going to be the one to break the news to him. That'll give me a break. He'll see those headlines, an' maybe he'll talk."

Scuttle was sitting facing the door when Lester Leith returned, and he thrust the folded paper forward before Leith had even deposited his hat and stick.

"There you are, sir."

"Where am I, Scuttle?"

"Right there on the front page. The mysterious ambulance figures in another robbery. This time it was shorter, quicker action. They got away with a bag from a bank messenger. The traffic police were notified by a prearranged signal. But the ambulance disappeared. The police have narrowed it down to a district of not more than forty square blocks. They're making an intensive search of that district."

Lester Leith took the paper from his valet, crumpled it into a ball and tossed it, unread, into the black cavern of the cold fireplace.

"Well, gang, we're ready to start."

"But aren't you interested in the account of the ambulance, sir?" Leith shook his head.

"Scuttle, cover both depots, find out every train that leaves after ten o'clock this evening and before eleven thirty. Get me a drawing room on each one of those trains where such accommodations are available. You might mention when you get the tickets that they are for a woman whose weight is somewhat above the average. Scuttle, I want no slip-up in the reservations."

The valet's eyes glinted with the light that comes into a cat's eyes when the cat hears the faint sound of motion just back of a mouse hole.

"Yes, sir. Where shall I get the tickets to, sir?"

"Any place, Scuttle, just so it's at least four hundred miles away.

Pick out various cities, depending upon the direction in which the train's going."

"Yes, sir, but there might be fifteen or twenty such trains, sir. It's the time when most of the crack trains leave."

"I would estimate the number at somewhere around that figure, Scuttle. Please get me a drawing room on each one of the trains."

The valet sighed. "Yes, sir."

"And at precisely nine-two tonight I shall have an errand for you to do, a most important errand."

"Yes, sir?"

"I shall want you to take these diamonds, the best matched necklace in the city, and show them to an artist in order to have a black and white drawing made. I shall want you to take Mrs. Crane with you. I shall want Mrs. Crane to have a suitcase all packed, ready to travel."

Sadie Crane regarded him for a minute with a puzzled frown. But she said no word.

The valet fairly oozed eagerness.

"Yes, sir. Your instructions will be obeyed to the letter. At ninetwo, sir? May I ask why you fix that particular minute?"

Lester Leith lit a cigarette, blew a smoke ring.

"Because, Scuttle, that happens to be the exact time I wish you to be at the place I am going to send you."

And Lester Leith walked into his den, stretched himself out in an easy chair, and sent spiraling clouds of blue smoke drifting upward from the end of his cigarette. His eyes followed those twisting spirals of smoke with deep concentration.

Only Louise Huntington, the social secretary, showed no concern or excitement. Her face did not even change expression.

The valet took advantage of the first opportunity to get a telephone. In a guarded tone he apprised Sergeant Ackley of the latest developments.

"What's this fat woman look like?" asked Ackley. "If she's going to make a trip we'd better be ready to tail her."

The undercover man chuckled.

"She tips the beam at three hundred and fifty. If you can't find that sort of a woman in a drawing room on a train, one of us is crazy."

"Can that line of chatter," snapped Sergeant Ackley, "and remember you're making an official report. We won't try to tail you. You just go wherever he sends you, but contact the office as soon

as you can reach a telephone, and keep us posted. Better rush back now—he'll be giving that fat dame secret instructions."

Scuttle laughed again, louder, more jubilantly.

"Sarge, I've got my rod, and I've got my bracelets. If that lump of tallow can pull anything on me you can start me back to the pavements tomorrow."

It was precisely seventeen minutes after nine o'clock in the evening. Three faces bent over a glittering necklace of diamonds. There was the heavy face of Scuttle, the valet; the jovial, good-natured face of Sadie Crane, the professional fat woman. And, in addition, there was the sharp, keenly thoughtful face of Stanley Garland, sole owner and proprietor of the Garland Printery.

"Well," said Garland, "what's he want done?"

"A black and white drawing," replied Scuttle.

Garland laughed. "I am an engraver. I have been a sign painter. I have done some art work. But will you tell me why any man should think an artist needed a real diamond necklace to copy from? If there is anything that is sketched entirely different from life it is a diamond. After all, my friends, art is mimicry. And when it comes to sketching light, one must use symbols. And a diamond is imprisoned light."

And Stanley Garland stood back and snapped his bony fingers, twisted the little cluster of waxed hairs that adhered to his upper lip, and gazed at his two visitors with obvious superiority.

Scuttle shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"I'm obeyin' orders. He said to take the necklace to you an' get a receipt. He said for the woman to take a few things and put them in a suitcase and be ready to travel. She's taking the ten o'clock Flyer.

"Now if you can put any of that stuff together and make sense out of it you can do more than I can. But the wages I get every month come from this chap, Leith, and when he says do something I do it."

Stanley Garland bristled.

"But I am an artist! I do unique illustrations for place cards. And I take orders from no one. I execute commissions, yes! But orders, NO!"

The fat woman placed a round hand upon the shoulder of the irate printer.

"Aw, be a sport! Give him a break."

"And a receipt for the diamonds," reminded Scuttle.

Stanley Garland looked at the diamonds once more.

"Where did he get them? I have heard about this perfectly matched necklace. I did the engraving for the invitations to his side show. But I have heard nothing of the history of this necklace. Who owns it? Where did it come from? What jeweler matched it? Was it purchased or borrowed?"

The undercover man stared gloomily.

"Now, brother, you're askin' real questions. We've had fifty men trying to find out the same thing for ten days, and they haven't uncovered a thing."

"Humph!" said Stanley Garland.

Sadie Crane waddled her impatient bulk across the office that had been fitted up at one end of the printing establishment. She carried her suitcase in her left hand—a suitcase packed under specific instructions from Lester Leith. It contained her professional costume—the jacket and the silk shorts—nothing else.

She walked to the door that opened into the printery—a door that opened inward. She put the suitcase down on the printery side of this door. Beyond gleamed the polished metal of huge presses, the dim perspective of the darkened printery.

Lester Leith had given her a sketch of the floor plan of the establishment. He seemed perfectly familiar with every detail. How Lester Leith had known these things she did not ask. She understood, generally, that Stanley Garland had a uniform method of impressing customers who called in the evening to consult with him upon important assignments. He had the lighting of the office just so, the dim perspective of the printery showing just so, behind the open door, and he always snapped his fingers and twisted his mustache and proclaimed he was an artist.

Lester Leith had advised her of all these things in detail. It was, of course, possible that he had secured the information from Louise Huntington, who had brought several orders to the office of the printery.

Now Stanley Garland made an exclamation of impatience.

"Take back the diamonds. I will tell him when I see him how foolish he is to send such a model. But you can tell him that, having once seen them, Stanley Garland can make a perfect . . ."

He broke off. There was the sound of a knob upon the outer door, turning very softly, very slowly.

The undercover man shot out a guarding hand to the diamonds.

The outer door swung slowly open.

The white face of Louise Huntington appeared in the crack. Scuttle recognized her, and the hand that had been at his hip relaxed slightly. But the hand that had held the diamond necklace remained in place.

"Hello, dearie!" said roly-poly Sadie Crane.

The girl acknowledged the salutation with a nod.

"Well," snapped Garland, "come in—if you're coming in."

"Are you alone?" asked Scuttle, suspiciously.

She nodded her head, came in, and kicked the door shut behind her. Then her right arm, coming slowly up, disclosed the glint of businesslike, blue steel.

"Those diamonds," she said, "are stolen. Put up your hands!"

Sheer surprise held the figures in that room motionless.

"Stolen!" exclaimed Scuttle.

The girl nodded down the barrel of the shaking gun.

"Don't point that gun this way. You might let it go off," said Scuttle, moving toward her.

"P-p-put up your hands!" said the girl. "I shall shoot!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Scuttle and took the gun from the quivering hand. "You fool! You might have killed somebody."

The girl flung herself against his shoulder and began to sob.

"No, no. I couldn't have. The gun wasn't loaded!"

The undercover man snapped back the breech of the weapon, laughed, and tossed it on the table.

"She's right. It wasn't loaded."

Stanley Garland regarded the valet with speculative eyes.

"You are brave, my friend. You advanced in the face of a threatening weapon in the hands of a hysterical woman."

"Bosh!" disclaimed Scuttle. "I've had experience with 'em. She wouldn't have shot, even if the gun had been loaded, but she might have jiggled her hand so bad the trigger got pulled. That was the danger."

"Nevertheless, it was brave."

Scuttle turned to the girl.

"Come on, Louise, kick through. What was the big idea?"

The girl sobbed, straightened, dried her eyes.

"Well, thank God, that's over with," she said.

Scuttle let his beady eyes bore into hers.

"Look here, you didn't think that necklace was stolen at all. You had orders from Lester Leith, now, didn't you?"

The girl hesitated, gulped, and nodded.

"Yes, I did. He told me to take this empty gun, come here and hold you up, on the pretext that the gems were stolen and that I thought you were all accomplices. Then I was to get the gems and go back into the printery... and then comes the funny part... I was to throw the stones out of the window and hide in the printery until Sergeant Ackley came."

Scuttle stiffened with astonishment.

"Sergeant Ackley!"

"Yes, I was to telephone him just before I came in here, telling him what I was to do. But I wasn't to tell anyone what I had done with the gems. I was to let them search me, and search the printery. I think Mr. Leith wanted Ackley to think the stones were hidden somewhere in the printery, and that I was a thief. I guess he wanted a search made."

Scuttle sat down in a chair.

"I've seen that goof pull some fool schemes, but this is the worst of the lot. You telephoned Ackley?"

"Yes, of course."

"He said he'd be here in fifteen minutes."

Sadie Crane glanced at a huge watch that was strapped around her fat wrist.

"I gotta be goin'. I gotta catch that train."

"You got a cab waiting?" asked Louise.

The fat woman nodded. "A special cab with a wide door, dearie."

"I saw it outside," said the girl in a toneless voice.

"What I don't understand..." began Scuttle, and stopped as a cold circle of metal touched his neck.

He rolled his eyes backward, saw the snapping orbs of Stanley Garland, the thin lips, the shrewd features.

"You are a brave man," said Garland, "and I do not take chances with you. Get them up, quickly! And this gun is loaded!"

The undercover man read the expression in those snapping eyes, and his hands shot up in the air, instantly, and without hesitation.

The exploring hands of Stanley Garland fished in Scuttle's hip pockets, found the service revolver, the handcuffs.

"Ah!" he purred, "a trap, perhaps. You are a special officer, eh? Well, my special officer, we shall give you a taste of your own medicine. How would you like to feel the bite of your own handcuffs, eh?"

And the printer clicked the handcuffs on Scuttle's wrists. Then

he turned to the women—the beautiful social secretary, whose sobs had dried as though by magic, and the professional fat woman who regarded the whole proceeding with bubbling good nature.

"Stay where you are," he said. "A move and you will be dead."

And he scooped up the necklace which had been described as the most perfectly matched diamond necklace in the city, and darted through the door into the printery. He slammed that door shut, and there was the click of a bolt.

Scuttle regarded his handcuffed wrists in impotent fury.

"Well, of all things!" said Louise Huntington. "Now what do you think of that?"

Sadie Crane looked at her watch.

"I gotta make that train, an' I got to have my shorts an' my jacket. I promised him I would, an' he's been just like a brother to me! And now that sneaky-eyed cuss has gone and locked the door on my suitcase!"

Suddenly the roar of a revolver sounded from the printery. A call for help. That call was in the unmistakable voice of Lester Leith.

Then came the sounds of a struggle, of articles turning over with a crash. Type, piles of paper, chairs, tables, marble slabs, crashed to the floor. Then—silence.

"If you could just lean against that door right," suggested Scuttle to the three-hundred-and-fifty-pound woman, "I have an idea I could kick the lock and—"

He never finished. The bolt shot back and Lester Leith appeared on the threshold. His clothes were torn. His collar was ripped off. There was dust on his expensive evening suit. His hat was gone.

"What's all this?" he asked.

Scuttle regarded him with black, accusing eyes.

"That's what I want to know."

Lester Leith slumped in a chair. For once his calm control of himself and the situation seemed to have slipped from his grasp.

"I thought Garland was guilty of those Demarest and other ambulance robberies. I got Louise to pretend those gems were stolen, thinking Garland might fall into my trap when he heard the police were coming. I felt I could hide in the printery, watch him as he escaped, and that he might direct me to the hiding place of the Demarest loot.

"It worked like a charm, but when I tried to arrest him, he fought with the skill of a professional. And he had an extra gun on him. I took one away. He had another."

"Mine," admitted Scuttle.

Lester Leith regarded him reproachfully.

"Scuttle, I'm surprised. You shouldn't go around armed. That was where my plans went awry. He had that extra gun. I escaped being shot by a miracle—but, Sadie, you *must* get that train!"

She nodded.

"But my suitcase was locked up in the other room."

"Get it," said Lester Leith, "and get started! If you miss the train, my whole side show will be ruined."

The fat woman waddled toward the printery door.

"Did you really telephone Ackley?" asked Scuttle of Louise Huntington.

She shook her head.

"That was just the story I was to tell."

Scuttle washboarded his forehead.

"This is all too deep for me. But I'll get him right now."

He awkwardly worked the telephone, and got Sergeant Ackley on the wire. While he was talking with the sergeant, Sadie Crane waddled out of the room, her face streaming perspiration with the effort for speed.

Her heavy steps sounded on the short flight of stairs outside the door. Then there was the grinding of gears and her cab rolled away.

It was at that moment Scuttle finished his conversation and dropped the receiver back on the hook.

"There's more to this than appears on the surface," he said, fastening his coal-black eyes on Leith. "Ackley says he had you tailed and you slipped the shadow."

Leith nodded ruefully. He took a cigarette from the torn pocket of his dinner jacket and put it to his lips.

"Admitted, Scuttle. This is one time I made the mistake of actually trying to solve a crime riddle instead of taking only an academic interest in it. Is Sergeant Ackley coming?"

"Right now," snapped the undercover man.

"I'll tell him all about it when he gets here," said Lester Leith.
"I'm all out of breath now."

It was but a matter of minutes before the wailing siren of the police car outside was followed by rapid steps, and Sergeant Ackley at the head of a determined knot of blue-coated men, thrust his way into the room.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

Beaver, the undercover agent, winked warningly at his superior.

"Take off these handcuffs and I'll tell my story first," he said.

Sergeant Ackley fitted a key to the cuffs, clicked them open.

"Shoot," he said.

Beaver, still keeping in the character of Scuttle, the valet, told his story; told it from the standpoint of a puzzled servant who didn't know what it was all about, but wanted the police to know the facts.

When he had finished, Sergeant Ackley turned to the social secretary.

"Now you."

The girl hesitated.

"Tell the truth, Louise," said Lester Leith.

"All of it?" she asked.

"All of it," said Lester Leith.

"Well, it started after I got my employment at Mr. Leith's place. Things just didn't seem right, and I was going to quit. Then Mr. Leith told me I was under suspicion in connection with the Demarest affair—which I knew already, of course. And he thought he knew who was really guilty.

"He told me if I would do just as he instructed he felt confident he could trap the criminal into exposing his guilt. Naturally, I

agreed to remain on and follow his orders.

"Then, tonight, Mr. Leith told me to take an empty gun, go here and try to hold up Scuttle, telling him the necklace was stolen. He said Scuttle would take the gun away from me, and that I was to be sure and tell him I had notified you to come here and that the circumstances of your coming were such that you'd search the place.

"If Scuttle didn't take the gun away from me, I was to take the diamond necklace, run into the printery, and toss the stones out of the window."

Sergeant Ackley frowned.

Scuttle interposed a comment.

"Lester Leith, of course," he said significantly, "being concealed in the printery all the time. When it reached that stage he'd have interfered."

"I didn't know anything about that," said the girl.

Sergeant Ackley nodded his approval.

"Good point, Scuttle. I was just about to make it myself when you interrupted."

The sergeant turned to Lester Leith.

"And now we'll hear your story. It looks very much as though you'd finally stubbed your toe, my supercilious friend."

Leith raised a hand in a gesture of deprecation.

"Tut, tut, my dear sergeant, you must learn not to jump at conclusions. Wait until you hear my story. The law requires that a man shall have a hearing before being judged guilty, you know."

"You'll have your chance, fast enough," said Sergeant Ackley, "and just remember that anything you say can be used against you."

Lester Leith nodded, made some shift to straighten his torn and rumpled garments.

"You'll pardon my appearance, sergeant?"

"Oh, most certainly," said the sergeant, with an exaggerated air of nicety.

Lester Leith lit a fresh cigarette.

"Thank you, sergeant. You see, I was interested in the Demarest affair. Of course you know of my penchant for studying the newspaper accounts of crime. And the newspaper clippings of the Demarest robbery pointed to what was, at least to my mind, an obvious clue."

Sergeant Ackley hitched well forward in his chair.

"Yes, I thought so. What was the clue?"

"The ambulance, sergeant. You see, the ambulance figured as an integral part of the scheme. It had the words *Proctor & Peabody* painted on it, and everyone agreed that those words were painted quite prominently, too prominently to be in good taste.

"Now Proctor & Peabody run a line of ambulances and of hearses. It is impossible that a car could have their name lettered on it and escape detection. After the Demarest affair the roads were blocked within a given district and all cars within that district subjected to close scrutiny. Yet the ambulance vanished. Now I had a theory about that, but I couldn't be absolutely certain. I determined to wait for a short time and see if the ambulance wasn't used again. It was such a good idea and it worked so easily in the Demarest robbery that I felt certain the criminals would use it again.

"You know the answer. It was used, and most effectively. Once more the ambulance vanished from the face of the earth. But by that time I was certain of my theory.

"You see, the invitation presented by Mrs. Pensonboy Forster when she secured admission to the Demarest affair was forged. The engraving was forged perfectly, but the art work—the hand lettering of each guest's name, added later to the engraved invitation—the lettering showed discrepancies.

"You suspected the social secretary because the forgery of the

engraving was so perfect that you felt the invitations must have been left where they would be accessible to the forger. But you overlooked the fact that the lettering was not so faithfully copied.

"Therefore, I came to the conclusion that the person who forged the invitation for Mrs. Pensonboy Forster had had access to the blank engraved invitation, but not to the *completed* invitation. Yet he was an artist or he wouldn't have drawn in the name as cleverly as he did.

"And the ambulance affair also pointed to an artist. You see, sergeant, an ambulance legitimately bearing the name of *Proctor & Peabody*, displayed quite prominently, could never have escaped detection. But a signpainter-artist could easily have lettered the name on flexible curtains which could have been adjusted to a specially-made delivery truck, and made it look like an ambulance.

"The curtains could be snapped on, and the truck changed into an ambulance. They could instantly have been taken off, and the 'ambulance' would revert to a commercial truck.

"That suggested a business establishment with a light delivery truck. It suggested a criminal with access to engraving facilities, with access to the Demarest invitations. It suggested a criminal who was also an artist and a sign painter.

"You see, now, sergeant, how the finger of suspicion pointed to Stanley Garland. He had but to fill in an extra, blank invitation with some of his own hand lettering, and his accomplice was passed into the Demarest reception. The rest was easy. His accomplices could be men who were actually employed in the printery. They changed the truck into an ambulance, looted the place, changed the ambulance back into a truck, and went through the police cordon with no difficulty whatever. The police recognized the truck with the sign of the Garland Printery upon it, and raised not so much as a question."

Sergeant Ackley heaved a great sigh.

"It sounds reasonable," he admitted, "and yet it's so obvious, why didn't we think of that? Go on."

The clubman shrugged his shoulders.

"The rest was easy, sergeant, too easy. I secured some kunzite made into a necklace. That stone has almost as much fire as a diamond. Against white cotton it will fool anyone who is not an expert. By a process of suggestion I made everyone think it was a very valuable diamond necklace. Then I had my valet bring it to Garland.

"I knew he would be tempted. So I arranged to speed up the affair a bit. I had Louise Huntington come in with an empty gun and claim the necklace was stolen, that she had the police on the way. And I primed her with a story to tell, after Scuttle had taken the gun away from her, that would appeal to the ears of Garland alone.

"It was a story that sounded foolish unless its object had been to make the police enter the place to search the printery. Of course, Garland saw the scheme immediately. He thought I was onto him, and that the police were on the way. He had to get away rapidly and take what loot he could with him, so he decided he might as well take this well-matched diamond necklace too.

"I, of course, was waiting in the printery, watching and listening, and I was armed. I waited until Garland had come into the place, had rushed to his secret hiding place, had given unmistakable proof of his guilt, and then I tried to arrest him.

"I made him throw up his hands. And then, when I had taken his gun away from him, he surprised me. He had a second weapon on him, one that, it now appears, he had taken away from my valet.

"He surprised me with that weapon. We struggled. He overpowered me and made his escape with the kunzite necklace and the cream of the loot from the Demarest affair. But I have no doubt he had to leave a lot of his plunder. We might look, sergeant?"

The sergeant was on his feet. "Come on, men. Take Leith with us. See that he has no chance to escape. I'm not entirely satisfied yet."

They entered the printery, found a light switch, flooded the shop with light, and, instantly, the correctness of Leith's reasoning was disclosed.

There was a secret panel in the wall. Inside it was a motley collection. There were rolled curtains of some fabrikoid material which were arranged with snaps to be fastened onto the side of a car. They bore in big letters *Proctor & Peabody*. There were gems, quantities of gold settings, and some coin. There remained none of the better class of stones or any of the currency. It appeared as though someone had scooped out about as much as could conveniently be carried.

Sergeant Ackley surveyed the secret hiding place, checked through the plunder which remained.

"It's the stolen stuff all right," he admitted. "There's around fifty thousand dollars of bulky stuff here. The man must have escaped with around two hundred thousand dollars, in round figures, if we count both the currency and the stones together."

Leith nodded.

"Too bad he got away," he said.

Sergeant Ackley looked at the clubman long and earnestly. He stroked the angle of his jaw with a spade-like thumbnail, and the gray stubble gave forth little rasping noises.

"If your plan had worked, you'd have had him cornered here in

the printery," he said.

Lester Leith nodded.

"And he'd have had about two hundred thousand dollars on him. And you two men would have been here alone."

Leith shrugged his shoulders. "Until I could have summoned the

police, of course."

"Of course!" echoed Sergeant Ackley, and there was no attempt to disguise the sarcasm of his voice. "And we have been on your trail for a year as a hijacker. Now suppose you had made the arrest and then signified to Garland that he could escape if he left the loot behind. And then suppose you had ruffled yourself all up and claimed you'd been in a struggle, and told the same story you now tell. You'd be just two hundred thousand dollars to the good."

Lester Leith smiled faintly. "You wouldn't accuse me of a crime in the presence of witnesses unless you had some ground for the accusation."

"Certainly," agreed the officer, his voice still dripping sarcasm. "I wouldn't think of it for a moment. I was only mentioning that if the circumstances had been different, and if you had told the same story you now tell, the circumstances would appear the same as we now have them.

"Under the circumstances, I think I'll make a complete search of your person, Leith, and I'll have my men go through this printery with a fine-tooth comb, looking for a concealed package somewhere."

"Certainly," said Leith, repeating the word and tone of the officer. "I would like you to do that so I would be relieved of any suspicion."

They searched him, and they found nothing. They searched the printery and they found nothing, and then there came a wild exclamation from the undercover man.

"Good God! The fat girl! She took the Flyer!"

Ackley frowned at him.

"Spill it, quick!"-

"And her suitcase was in the printery! If she'd set it down there, and then Garland had locked the door and gone to his hiding place, and Leith had hijacked the stolen gems from him, and simply put

them in the fat girl's suitcase, and the fat girl had gone to the train, she wouldn't have ever suspected the contents of the suitcase until . . ."

Sergeant Ackley gave a bellow of inarticulate rage.

"Get to the telephone! The idea of letting anything like that go on under your nose!"

"I was handcuffed," reminded Scuttle.

"Seems to me," remarked Lester Leith, "that, for a valet, you show a most official and officious type of mind. I'm afraid you might instill a suspicion into the head of our dear but overzealous sergeant."

"Suspicion, hell!" yelled Ackley. "It's a certainty. Here, let me at that telephone."

He grabbed the instrument and began to throw out a dragnet. The Flyer left at ten o'clock. He assigned men to cover the depot, the gatemen, the taxicabs, and soon the reports began to filter in.

The telephone announced that special officers, covering the train, had reported a very fat woman who had held a ticket to a drawing room. She was carrying a suitcase, and the suitcase was constantly in her hand. She had been escorted aboard the train with difficulty, the suitcase with her. She had almost jammed in the door of the drawing room. It had taken assistance to get her in.

Sergeant Ackley got into immediate action. He ordered the arrest of the woman at a suburban stop where the Flyer was scheduled to make its last stop for through passengers.

Lester Leith gazed at him reproachfully.

"If you arrest that woman you will be responsible for a grave injustice and subject yourself to a suit for false arrest," he said.

"You admit you purchased the ticket on which she's traveling?" asked Ackley, his eye on Scuttle.

Lester Leith clamped his lips shut.

"You have accused me of a crime. I could explain this whole affair in a few words. As it is, I shall say nothing until I have counsel present. But I want the witnesses to remember that I warned you against arresting this woman."

Sergeant Ackley's only comment was a sneer of triumph.

"You came so close to getting away with it, no wonder you're sore. If I hadn't thought of that fat woman, you'd have pulled one of the slickest jobs of all time."

Ten minutes passed. The telephone shrilled its summons. A report came in from the suburban town. They had caught the train, arrested the woman, taken her from the drawing room. The suitcase

she carried had been opened. It contained a green silk jacket and some shorts, rather a skimpy costume for a fat woman in a side show.

Ackley chewed a cigar meditatively.

"Have men stay on the train and search every inch of the drawing room. Bring the woman to the central station. I'll meet you there."

He turned and glowered about him.

"This party's going to adjourn," he said.

They went to the central station. After an hour a police car arrived with an angry fat woman. She was taken to a cell. Sergeant Ackley gave her a third degree. The woman told a straightforward story. She had never seen Lester Leith but twice in her life—once when she went to his office in response to a want ad, once when he had called upon her with a suitcase and a railroad reservation and employed her to take the suitcase on the train to the destination of the ticket.

She refused to admit she had been previously employed by Leith, or that his valet had taught her to fall in a faint; she denied ever having been in a side show.

Ackley called in Beaver to confront her.

It needed but a glance at the goggle eyes of the undercover man to give Ackley his answer.

"That's not the one. I never saw her before . . . Yes I did, too. She was one of the unsuccessful applicants for the job Sadie Crane got."

Ackley's jaw sagged.

"Then . . . she doesn't even look like the other?"

"No. This one is blonde. The other was brunette. This one has black eyes, the other had hazel eyes. They're both fat—that's all."

"And because I didn't ask for a description I presume I'll be on the carpet," groaned Ackley.

They went back to the room where Lester Leith was being held.

"Where's Sadie Crane?" rasped Ackley.

Leith blew a cloud of smoke in a lazy spiral.

"I'm sure I wouldn't tell you."

Beaver spoke up again.

"He had fifteen drawing-room reservations on night trains. Maybe she went on one of those other reservations."

Ackley exploded into action.

"Beaver, you have the most infuriating habit of withholding important information!" he yelled, and got busy once more on the telephone.

Investigation disclosed a startling fact. Five of Leith's drawing-room reservations had been filled. Each one with a woman of astonishingly ample proportions, each woman with a suitcase which never left her hand.

It was a stupendous job to intercept each train and interview each woman, search each suitcase—chartered airplanes, long-distance telephone calls, emergency stop signals on various railroads . . .

By morning several facts were apparent.

The railroad systems out of the city had been badly confused by a wholesale stopping of limited trains at various points en route. Five fat women had been taken from trains to automobiles. They were all yelling vehement threats of lawsuits. Five suitcases had been confiscated. Each suitcase contained exactly the same thing—a pair of green trunks and a jacket.

Sergeant Ackley finally threw up his hands in disgust.

He had disrupted railroads, irritated powerful officials. He had done it all on a suspicion alone, and he had subjected himself to several suits by irate fat women who, as Lester Leith pointed out, were more inconvenienced at being jammed into police automobiles than were thin women.

Also, as Lester Leith managed to point out, Ackley had done virtually nothing toward apprehending the man, Garland, who had escaped; nor had he acted diligently in rounding up Garland's accomplices.

By the time Ackley had turned his attention to that angle of the case, the accomplices had vanished. There remained for him nothing but the glory of having solved the Demarest robbery, and he took unto himself every bit of that glory.

Three days later Ackley received a hurried call from Beaver.

"The apartment where Sadie Crane lived is occupied. No one knows who's in it, but the milkman delivers three quarts of whipping cream every day."

Sergeant Ackley gripped the receiver until the skin over his knuckles was pale. "I'm coming right over," he said.

"Leith is in his apartment," cautioned Beaver.

"Keep him there," roared Ackley, and slammed down the telephone.

He made record time to Leith's apartment house.

A hammering on the door of the apartment where Sadie Crane had lived was answered by a thin wisp of a man.

"Who are you?" demanded Ackley.

"I'm Spinner."

"What are you doing here?"

"I married Sadie Crane."

"Where's your wife now?"

"In the sitting room, the last I saw of her."

"Here?"

"Yes, sir."

Sergeant Ackley picked the thin little man up bodily by the coat collar, set him to one side, and strode into the apartment.

He came to a spacious room, in the center of which, sitting in a specially made armchair, cheerfully knitting, was a mountain of flesh.

"You Sadie Crane?" he yelled.

She shook her head.

"Who are you, then?"

"Sadie Crane Spinner. I married Arthur Spinner yesterday."

Sergeant Ackley took a deep breath, controlled the outburst that quivered on his lips.

"You were at the Garland Printery the night Scuttle was there?"

"Oh, yes."

"You were to take the Flyer?"

"Yes, indeed."

"At the request of Lester Leith?"

"Yes. He wanted me to take a suitcase with my things in it and put on a performance in some suburban town."

"But you changed your plans at the last minute?"

"Oh, yes. You see, when I left the printery to take a cab to the depot, the cabbie had a note that had just been delivered. It was from Leith telling me not to catch the train. He'd changed his mind. He said to take the suitcase up to his apartment and leave it there and go back to my apartment and wait until I heard from him. So I did it. It suited me—I don't like to ride on trains. The berths ain't big enough."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were bulging.

"You came here, and have been here all the time?"

"Certainly. Then I got married and had to give up the idea of traveling. I've got to take care of Arthur."

"And your suitcase? What became of it?"

"Oh, Mr. Leith brought it back here the next morning. He said he'd changed his plans." Sergeant Ackley fitted the mental picture puzzle together.

"What was in the suitcase when he returned it?"

"My trunks and jacket."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"What are you doing now?"

"On my honeymoon. Times are good. Lester Leith employed me at twenty-five dollars a day as a human elephant, my husband at the same figure as a walking skeleton. When his side show blew up he gave us a month's pay in lieu of notice; and the apartment's rented until the middle of the month and the rent paid. So we're staying on here."

"Well," remarked Sergeant Ackley, "I'm a cock-eyed—"

The woman nodded cheerfully.

Sergeant Ackley strode into the apartment of Lester Leith. Scuttle let him in, flashed him a look of inquiry.

Ackley walked to the chair where Lester Leith was blowing spirals of cigarette smoke.

"Pretty clever, sending a woman to the only place I'd never look for her—right back to her own apartment. I covered every train, arrested five fat women who were false alarms, covered every hotel and rooming house—and here she was all the time!"

Lester Leith shrugged.

"Of course. That's where she would be if I were innocent of the crime you accused me of. But you thought I was guilty, so you looked in all the wrong places."

Sergeant Ackley's hands clenched.

"And you had only to take the loot from Garland, slip it in Sadie Crane's suitcase, have her take it out of the printery for you, then come to *this* apartment—take it out right under our noses—and you cleaned up two hundred thousand dollars!"

Lester Leith coughed deprecatingly. "You wouldn't want to accuse me of a crime without proof."

"Two-hundred-thousand-dollars!"

Leith traced the perimeter of a smoke ring with his forefinger.

"And even if you had proof, you couldn't convict me of any crime."
"Why not?"

"Because any package which *might* have contained any loot would have also had my kunzite necklace mingled with it, and it's no crime to recover your own stolen property. If any other property should

have happened to be mingled with it, that would come under the legal head of commingled personal property."

Sergeant Ackley scraped his jaw with his thumbnail.

"I'll—be—"

"You will if you use profanity," interrupted Lester Leith.

But Sergeant Ackley had already stormed to the door . . .

BIRD IN THE HAND

L ester Leith surveyed his valet through a film of blue cigarette smoke. His thought-slitted eyes were brittle-hard with interest.

"Found him dead, eh, Scuttle?"

"Dead as a doornail, sir," he said.

Lester Leith's eyes became speculative. He inhaled a deep drag of smoke which made the end of the cigarette glow like a coal in the half-darkness beyond the floor lamp.

There followed a silence, broken only by the crackling of the flames in the fireplace. The valet, poised on the balls of his feet like a man about to strike a knockout blow, watched his master as a cat might stare at a mouse. But Leith's eyes were focused upon the twisting spiral of cigarette smoke which eddied upward from the end of the cigarette.

"Murdered, of course, Scuttle?"

The valet wet his thick lips with the tip of a nervous tongue. He looked up.

"Why do you say 'of course'?" he asked.

Lester Leith made a deprecatory gesture with the hand which held the cigarette.

"According to your statement, the man was an international gem thief. He'd arrived on the boat with a big shipment of stolen gems, or there's every reason to believe he had them.

"The customs had a spy planted on the boat, a man who acted as room steward. He'd found out that a small steamer trunk, made along the lines of a miniature wardrobe trunk, had been cleverly designed with a false side that would slip out when one unscrewed the lock. And the smuggler evidently realized the steward had made the discovery, for he lured him down into a passage back of the baggage room, knocked him unconscious, bound and gagged him.

"Then the smuggler landed, got his ingenious trunk through customs and went to the Palace Hotel. You tell me that the steward regained consciousness, managed to free himself and telephoned the police and the customs authorities. They rushed to the Palace Hotel and found their man dead. It's a natural assumption that he had been murdered."

The valet nodded his head in oily agreement.

"Well, sir, whether it's the natural assumption or not, the man was murdered. There was a knife driven right through his heart."

Lester Leith blew a contemplative smoke ring, watched it as it drifted upward and disintegrated.

"Humph," he said at last. "Any sign of a struggle?"

The valet's voice lowered, as though he was about to impart a secret.

"Now we're coming to the strange part of it, sir. The man had been tied in a chair, bound hand and foot and gagged, and *then* he'd been stabbed."

Lester Leith's eyes became level-lidded with concentration.

"Yes?" he said, his voice like that of a chess player who is concentrating on the board, "and the trunk?"

"The trunk, sir—was gone!"

And the last two words, coming at the end of an impressive pause, were hurled forth like a denunciation.

Lester Leith's eyes abruptly became lazy-lidded with mirth.

"Come, come, Scuttle, there's no need to be so dramatic about it. You're like an amateur elocutionist at a charity entertainment reciting *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*. Of course the trunk was gone. Obviously, the man was murdered by someone who wanted the jewels."

The spy wagged his head solemnly.

"No, sir, you don't understand. The police were right on the man's heels. He hadn't been in the hotel fifteen minutes when the police arrived."

Lester Leith let his forehead crease in a frown of annoyance.

"Well, what of it? Obviously, fifteen minutes was time enough for a murder. It should have been time enough for a robbery as well. Hang it, Scuttle, what's the big idea? You're as mysterious about this as an old hen with a choice morsel of gossip. Why the devil shouldn't the trunk have gone?"

The valet answered with the faintest touch of triumph in his voice.

"Because, sir, every piece of baggage that's checked into the Palace Hotel is listed on their records, and there's never a piece of baggage that goes out that isn't checked against that list. They had too much trouble with baggage thieves and with guests who slipped their baggage out of the back door. So they installed a baggage checker.

"Now that trunk of Cogley's was distinctive. It was striped so it could be easily identified in customs. The baggage checker remembers it being taken into the hotel, and he's positive it didn't go out. And the bellboys and the freight elevator man are all certain it didn't go out. The Palace Hotel is run on a system, and it's easier to get money out of the safe than to get baggage out without a proper check!"

Leith yawned.

"Very possibly, Scuttle. The Palace Hotel has several hundred rooms. It's obvious that the murderer simply took the trunk into a vacant room where he could work on it at his leisure."

The valet snorted.

"You must think the police are fools, sir!" he exclaimed, and there was a trace of bitterness in his voice. "All that was checked by the police. They realized that possibility within five minutes, and made a complete check of the place. It was done without any confusion or ostentation, of course, but it was done. A bellboy or a house detective or a police officer, under one excuse or another, entered every single room in the hotel within twenty minutes of the time the murder was discovered. What's more, every nook and cranny of the hotel was searched.

"And the trunk vanished. It simply evaporated into thin air. It went in, but it didn't stay in. Yet it didn't go out. There isn't a single clue to the murderer, nor to the trunk!"

And the spy smirked at Lester Leith with that exaltation shown on the face of a pupil when he asks a question which baffles the teacher.

Lester Leith shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, there's an explanation somewhere. Trunks don't vanish into thin air, you know. But why bother me with it? I'm not interested."

"I know, but you're always interested in unusual crimes."

"Was, Scuttle, was. Don't say that I am. I admit that I formerly took a more or less academic interest in crimes. But that was before Sergeant Ackley got the idea I was beating the police to the solution of the crime and robbing the robber." The valet's voice was insinuating.

"But this is such a very interesting crime, sir. After all, there'd be no harm in thinking out a theoretical solution, would there?"

Lester Leith did not answer the question directly.

"What other clues were there, Scuttle? How did the police decide that the murderer had entered?"

"Up the fire escape and through the window."

"The fire escape?"

"Yes, sir. The room was locked on the inside, the key was in the lock. The window opened on the fire escape and it had been jimmied. The marks of the jimmy showed plainly in the wood, and there were traces of prints on the fire escape, rubber heels."

Lester Leith tossed away the stub of the cigarette, took out his

cigarette case, absently abstracted another cigarette.

"Funny that the murderer could have worked so quickly, and it's strange that of all the rooms in the hotel the man would have secured one that opened on the fire escape. Of course, that solves the mystery of the trunk. The man took it down the fire escape with him—the murderer, I mean."

Long before Lester Leith finished, the valet was wagging his head in negation.

"No, sir. In the first place, it was the most natural thing in the world for Cogley to have a room which opened on the fire escape. The murderer had made all the arrangements. In the second place, the missing trunk couldn't possibly have gone through the window. The window is small, and the trunk, although smaller than the average wardrobe trunk, is, nevertheless, too big to . . ."

Lester Leith interrupted his valet.

"The murderer made arrangements for the room!"

"Yes, sir. You see, a Mr. Frank Millsap telephoned the hotel and said that he wanted two rooms, that they had to be adjoining and on the fourth floor. He seemed quite familiar with the hotel and suggested Rooms 405 and 407. He said the name of the party who would occupy 407 was Cogley.

"Of course, it's all clear now. He wanted to get this man, Cogley, in a room which had the fire escape opening from it. But the request didn't seem unusual then. When Cogley arrived from the boat and registered he was shown at once to the room. The clerk didn't ask him about the reservation, he was so certain that . . ."

Suddenly Lester Leith chuckled.

"That would be the police theory," he said.

"That is the police theory," said the spy with dignity.

Lester Leith raised an eyebrow.

"Indeed!" he muttered. "You seem remarkably well posted about it."

"I only read it in the newspaper!" said the spy hastily.

"I see," murmured Lester Leith, "and who was this Frank Mill-sap?"

"Probably a fence, a man who deals in stolen jewels on a large scale."

"And the loot, Scuttle?"

"There were at least five magnificent diamonds. The customs detective was certain of that. And then there were some odds and ends, amounting in all to rather a goodly sum, but the most valuable part of the loot consisted of the diamonds."

Leith nodded—a meditative, speculative nod.

"Are you interested, sir?" asked the spy anxiously.

Lester Leith sighed. "In spite of myself I'm becoming interested." "Ah-h-h-h!" breathed the spy, and his tone contained the satisfaction of a salesman who has just secured the name of the customer

on the dotted line.

"Yes," resumed Lester Leith, "I can almost think of a possible solution, Scuttle. That is, you understand, an academic solution. And I say 'almost,' because I am afraid to let my mind complete the thought and actually secure a solution.

"This confounded Sergeant Ackley is so obsessed with the idea that I beat the police to the solution of crimes, simply by reading of them in the newspaper... Bah! If I were a policeman, Scuttle, I'd hang my head in shame if I were ever driven to make such a confession of incompetency."

The valet followed the conversational lead.

"But you yourself have admitted that it's sometimes possible for one to reach what you refer to as an 'academic solution' through a study of the newspaper reports of crime."

"Certainly," agreed Lester Leith. "Many times all the facts necessary to solve a crime are in the hands of the police, and in the hands of the newspaper reporters. They simply don't fit those facts together. It's like one of those jigsaw puzzles. There may be all the parts in one's hands, but fitting each part so it dovetails with the corresponding part to make a complete picture is something else.

"What I was commenting on, Scuttle, was the attitude of the police. I would be ashamed to admit such a degree of incompetency as the

sergeant admits when he accuses me of doing what he thinks I have been doing."

The valet nodded, impatiently.

"Yes, sir. But *I've* always admired your academic solutions immensely. And you can confide in me quite safely. So, if you have any ideas about a solution—er—an academic solution of the present crime, sir, I should like to hear them."

Lester Leith yawned.

"You've given me all the facts, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. All the facts the newspapers have published."

"Let me see the papers."

"Yes, sir."

The valet passed over the newspapers. Lester Leith read them through.

His eyes were clouded with thought, his forehead furrowed in concentration.

"So the police have been watching everyone who checked out of the Palace Hotel since the crime, eh?"

"Yes. That is, the police have felt that there might have been an inside accomplice. If that were the case, it would undoubtedly be some transient guest, someone who checked into the hotel merely to help in the commission of the murder. And so they've been keeping an eye on those who checked out to see who they are and what they do for a living."

Leith nodded again. His eyes were narrowed now.

"Very interesting about the woman, Scuttle."

"What woman, sir?"

"The kleptomaniac. Didn't you read about her? The one who can't remain away from department stores and who always tries to pick the pockets of her gentlemen friends?"

The valet moved his massive shoulders in a gesture of impatience. "That's just an ordinary case, sir. She can't be involved in this

murder mystery."

Lester Leith raised disapproving eyes.

"Scuttle! Are you insinuating that you'd like me to solve this murder case and find the missing loot?"

"Just an academic solution," muttered the spy.

Lester Leith let his lips expand into a grin.

"Well, if I were giving an academic solution—and, mind you, it would be strictly academic—I'd get the kleptomaniac and a blood-hound-canary, and after that there'd be nothing to it."

The spy blinked twice, as a man blinks who has received a heavy blow on the head.

"A bloodhound-canary!" he said.

Lester Leith nodded.

"In a big cage, Scuttle. And I should say that the cage should be kept covered with canvas or a heavy twill."

The sigh of the police spy was much like a gasp.

"And the kleptomaniac. What would she have to do with a solution of the case?"

Lester Leith arched his brows in well-simulated surprise.

"But she's a thief!"

"Well?" demanded the spy.

"There's an axiom," proclaimed Lester Leith, "to the effect that it takes a thief to catch a thief. And one can't disregard axioms, Scuttle. You know that as well as I do—or should."

The valet shook his head as though he had taken a long dive through very cold waters and was seeking to catch his breath as well as to clear his vision.

"A kleptomaniac and a bloodhound-canary," he said. "I never heard of any such thing."

Lester Leith nodded.

"You'll get accustomed to the idea after a while. It's really very logical, Scuttle."

The valet grunted. "But what in heaven's name is a bloodhound-canary?"

Lester Leith lowered his voice.

"The bloodhound of the air, Scuttle."

"Huh?" said the valet.

Lester Leith nodded.

"It's the rarest breed of bird in the world, Scuttle," he said. "I'm not at all surprised you've never heard of it. In fact, there's only one specimen in this country. It belongs to a friend of mine who lives in the city—he brought it back from a dangerous trip to the tropics.

"The chief trait of a bloodhound-canary is that it can trail things through the air—other birds, or airplanes, or falling bodies—anything that goes through the air. That's due to its wonderful ability to recognize scents. We have canine bloodhounds that trail things across the ground. The rare bloodhound-canary does the same thing in the air a bloodhound does on the ground."

For a moment the valet was speechless. Lester resumed.

"And since this trunk vanished into thin air," he said, "I'd say a

man would need the help of my friend's valuable bloodhound-canary to trail it."

The valet, his face purple now, whirled on his heel.

"Very well," he gritted. "You've had your little joke. I tried to give you the facts you wanted because I thought you'd be interested. But being made the butt of a joke!"

And he strode toward the door which led from the room.

Lester Leith watched the man with laughing eyes. The spy was huge, some six feet odd of hulking strength, and he moved with a ponderous stealth, like a stalking elephant. Lester Leith, on the other hand, was closely knit, feline, quick-moving.

"Scuttle." he called.

The spy paused, his hand on the door.

"I wasn't making sport of you," drawled Lester Leith. "And since you seem inclined to doubt my statement, I've decided to show you just how a theoretical solution *could* be worked out with the aid of this wonderful canary and a kleptomaniac.

"Would you mind getting a cab, going to a bird store, and getting me a bird cage? I shall want a perfectly huge cage, Scuttle, one that has a diameter of at least four feet. And I'll want a cover for it. Have the cover tailored to fit smoothly—something made of dark cloth so that the canary will get lots of rest. It's very delicate, you know.

"I'll attend to getting the kleptomaniac myself, Scuttle. And I'll see my friend and borrow his flying bloodhound. And you may start now. Of course, you won't breathe a word of this to Sergeant Ackley."

And Lester Leith arose, flipped the cigarette into the fireplace, and strode toward his bedroom, leaving a gaping spy standing awkwardly, one hand on the door knob.

"But," stammered the spy, "I don't understand."

"No one asked you to, Scuttle," said Lester Leith, and slammed the bedroom door.

Bessie Bigelow glanced up at the man who sat in the taxicab, faultlessly tailored, wearing his evening clothes with an air of distinction.

"The bail," she said, "was five grand."

Lester Leith nodded, as though \$5,000 was distinctly a minor matter.

"Plus about a thousand to pay the department store," went on Bessie Bigelow.

Lester Leith nodded again.

Bessie reached over and placed a hand on his coat sleeve.

"Now listen, guy," she pleaded. "I'm a good scout, but I'm a shoplifter and a pickpocket, and I ain't nothing else. Don't get me wrong. You come along and play Santa Claus for me, but that ain't going to get you no place.

"I'm a crook, all right. I've worked the department stores and pulled the pickpocket stuff for a long time. I ain't no kleptomaniac. Kleptomaniac, my eye! That's a line of hooey the lawyer thought up for the judge, and the newspaper boys glommed onto it and made a big splurge about the beautiful woman who was in jail because she just couldn't keep her hands to home."

Lester Leith lit a cigarette. He hadn't even glanced at the blonde who was rattling off the conversation at his side.

"Listen," insisted the blonde, "if you're playin' Santa Claus with the idea that you're gettin' a blonde lady friend you got another guess comin'. And if you're one of those settlement workers that always come around givin' the girls a chance to reform, you got two more guesses comin'.

"I ain't goin' to be a sweetie, and I ain't goin' to reform. I'm spillin' it to you straight because you got a chance to go back an' glom the coin you put up for bail and to reimburse the department store. I've done lots o' things in my life, but I ain't never obtained no money from a gent under false pretenses. I'm a girl that shoots right straight from the shoulder, that's me."

Lester Leith nodded.

"Very commendable, your frankness," he muttered.

The girl snorted.

"Listen, guy, what do you want?"

Lester Leith turned to face her.

"I want your help."

"In what?"

"In convincing the police that I am innocent of certain crimes they try to pin on me."

The girl's blue eyes widened.

"Now that," she said judicially, "is a new one!"

Leith nodded.

"And what do I do?" she asked.

"You go to a hotel with me, and we get rooms, separate rooms, but rooms which adjoin," said Lester Leith.

The girl yawned.

"Pardon me," she said wearily.

"For yawning?" asked Lester Leith.

"Naw," she drawled, "for thinking your line was a new one. From there on, big boy, I know it by heart."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No," he said, "I'm afraid you don't."

"Well, go on," she said, "and don't hesitate in the rough places.

Spill it and get it over with. Exactly what is it you want?"

"I want you to occupy this room, probably as my sister or niece," said Lester Leith, "and I want you to come and go as you please. You will probably be followed by police, but that's a minor matter. And I want you to curb your illicit activities as much as possible. Use a certain amount of discretion as to the pockets you pick. That's all."

The girl's eyes were narrow, hard.

"Listen," she said, "I hate a damned mealy mouthed hypocrite. Now you been pretty decent to me. So come clean. If that's all, say so, and if it ain't, say so."

"That," said Lester Leith, "is all."

She sighed.

"Well," she said, "I sure gotta hand it to you. If that's all, you're sure a new one."

"Nevertheless, that is all," said Lester Leith. "Only I want to warn you that the police will be watching you. If you do exactly as I say they can't convict you of anything. If you fail to follow instructions you may get yourself into a rather tight fix."

Bessie Bigelow nodded.

"Guy," she proclaimed, "I like you, and I like the way you came across with the bail money. I'm going to do it."

Lester Leith's nod was rather impersonal.

"Thanks, Bessie," he said.

The cab rumbled on in silence.

"Well," said Bessie, rather ruefully, "if we're going to be pals, I may as well start shooting square by giving you back your things."

Her hand disappeared down the front of her dress, came out with something that glittered in the reflected street lights.

"Your watch," she said.

Lester Leith took it unsmilingly.

"Thank you, Bessie."

She regarded him with a puzzled expression.

"Didja know when I lifted it?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Within ten seconds after I got in the cab," she said. "I sized you

up as a settlement worker that was goin' to pull a lot o' hooey and wind up by having to be slapped to sleep, so I made up my mind I'd get mine while the gettin' was good."

Lester Leith returned the watch to his pocket.

"I don't blame you," he said.

Her next sigh was almost a groan.

"And your wallet," she said. "It sure feels fat."

She passed over his wallet.

"Take that after the watch?" asked Lester Leith with a note of respect in his voice.

"Naw," she said. "I took that while you was talking with the bail clerk, right after you put up the six grand . . . listen, guy, you ain't lost nothing but a thousand bucks, that's what the department store took to square up the charge account. The rest of the money is simply bail, and they can't make that shoplifting charge stick. They can't identify the goods. I'll stick right around and demand trial, and they'll dismiss the case. Then your five grand comes back."

Lester Leith muttered another word of thanks.

"And if you let me work that hotel we're goin' to, I'll have your thousand back for you inside of a couple of weeks."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Bessie. While you're with me, your play is to be the sad, penitent kleptomaniac who is taking treatments from a psychiatrist, having, however, occasional symptoms."

"Okay," she said. "You shoot square with me and I'll shoot square with you."

The cab drew up in front of the Palace Hotel.

Lester Leith assisted the girl to the ground. He indicated three bags to the doorman and stalked into the lobby. The clerk bowed obsequiously, spun the register, and handed him the desk pen.

"I believe," said Lester Leith, with dignity, "that you have a reservation for me?"

"Yes?" asked the clerk. "What was it?"

"The name," said Lester Leith, "is Frank Millsap. I wired about rooms. I was to have 407 reserved for me, and 405 for a friend of mine."

And Lester Leith scrawled a signature across the hotel register.

Frank Millsap, he wrote.

Had he slapped the clerk in the face with a wet towel, that individual could not have shown greater astonishment or dismay.

"Mill . . . Millsap . . . Frank Millsap . . . 405!" he stammered.

"Yes," snapped Lester Leith, "Millsap, and I fail to see any reason for excitement or comment. I made the reservation over the telephone several days ago."

The clerk took a deep breath, gripped the sides of the counter.

"But Mr. Cogley came here . . ."

"Mister Cogley!" snapped Lester Leith. "Who the devil said anything about a Mister Cogley? The room was reserved for Miss Cogley, my niece. And I want to warn you that she's suffering from a certain type of nervous disorder and any commotion is quite likely to raise the devil with her nerves. Now get busy and assign us to those rooms."

The clerk was gaping.

"You mean to say . . ."

"I mean to say," snapped Lester Leith, "that I have come here to secure treatment for my niece, that she's highly nervous, and that I wanted rooms on the fourth floor because she prefers the fourth floor, and that I wanted rooms back from the street to be away from the noise. I secured the assurance of the manager that 405 and 407 would be reserved, and I want those rooms."

The clerk nodded.

"Just one moment," he said. "I'll have to consult the manager!"

"Very well. Consult him then!" said Lester Leith. "While you're doing that I'll bring in the rest of my baggage, a very valuable bloodhound-canary, and I don't want him subjected to any undue jar or noise. He's very delicate. In fact, I'll carry the cage myself!"

He stalked to the door, where a second taxicab had drawn up to the curb. Inside that cab was an enormous cage tightly covered with a black cloth which had been tailored to fit over the bars like a glove.

Lester Leith pushed aside the curious doorman, the eager bellboys, gently lifted the big cage from the cab, raised it to his shoulder, carried it into the hotel.

From the interior of the cage came the sound of little fluttering noises.

Sergeant Arthur Ackley, bull-necked, grim-jawed, sat at the battered desk at headquarters which had been the scene of many a stormy interview.

The side of the desk bore scratches from the nails of police shoes, where they had been elevated from time to time in moments of relaxation.

The surface was grooved with various charred lines, marking the places where cigarettes had been parked and forgotten.

Across this desk, facing the sergeant, was Edward H. Beaver, the man who worked under cover as valet for Lester Leith, and upon whom Leith had bestowed the nickname of Scuttle.

"I know a canary has got something to do with it," Beaver was saying. "It sounds goofy, and it is goofy. A bloodhound-canary! But when you stop to think it over, it ain't so goofy after all. He's always getting some fool thing that don't make sense, and then using it to . . ."

He broke off as the telephone shrilled its summons.

Sergeant Ackley grunted in the process of leaning over the desk, then scooped the telephone to him. He twisted the cigar to one side of his mouth, sighed wearily.

"Yeah," he growled.

The receiver rattled like a tin can tied to the tail of a fleeing dog. Sergeant Ackley gradually hitched himself bolt upright. His eyes popped wide open.

"Huh?" he said.

The receiver rattled again.

Sergeant Ackley cleared his throat and by a conscious effort tightened his lips.

"Okay. Now get this straight. Play right into his hands. Let him get away with it, with anything. And rush ten of the boys right down there. Let 'em register as guests. Stick a dick on the elevator. Put one of our men at the desk. But keep the whole thing under cover. Don't let him think there's a plainclothesman in the place. Get me? Let him think he ain't tailed.

"But keep a watch on his door, and keep a watch on that fire escape. Don't let him make a move that ain't reported. And if he ever tries to leave that hotel, have one of the boys pretend to be a sucker from the sticks that's had his pockets picked. See?

"Let him make a squawk and there'll be a man in uniform always within call. Let them hang the pickpocket rap on Leith for a hurry-up search. Get me? This is once I ain't taking no chances. Now get busy!"

Sergeant Ackley slammed the receiver back on the hook, banged the telephone down on the desk, and glowered at his undercover man.

"The crust of the damned fool!" he exploded.

"What's he done now?" asked Beaver.

"Gone to the Palace Hotel and claimed he was the Frank Millsap that telephoned in the reservation for Millsap and Cogley, and that the woman he's got with him is his niece."

Beaver wet his lips.

"You mean the kleptomaniac?"

"That's the baby. He put up the bail and squared the department store charge account for a thousand bucks, cash money. Then he shows up at the hotel and says her name's Cogley and that she's suffering from a nervous trouble. The clerk stalled him along while he telephoned in, and now I'm going to get enough men on the job to cover the case right. I ain't going to let that damned, supercilious, smirking..."

Beaver interrupted.

"Has he got the canary?" he asked.

"He sure has! He's got the thing all wrapped up in a cage that's big enough for an eagle."

Beaver furrowed his brows.

"What the devil does he want with a canary? And why does he insist it's a 'bloodhound-canary'?"

Sergeant Ackley waved his hand, the gesture of one who brushes aside an unimportant detail.

"Forget it! He's just got that canary to kid us along. He wants to sidetrack us. Concentrate your attention on the main problem, Beaver. We gotta find out what he's doing in that hotel... Not that we don't know. It's simple as hell. What I mean is that we gotta do like the Japs do with their pelicans."

Beaver's eves widened.

"What's that got to do with it?"

Sergeant Ackley laughed.

"Plenty. They starve the birds and then take 'em out on their boats. They clamp a ring around their necks to keep 'em from swallowing. The bird sees a school of fish and flies over, swoops down and scoops up a whole beakful of 'em, an' a pelican's beak holds a lot. Then the bird tries to swallow 'em, but the ring keeps the fish right where they belong. The Jap pries the bird's bill open, spills out the fish, and sends him away after more fish.

"Now this guy, Leith, has been lucky. I ain't giving him credit for any great amount of brains, but for a lot o' luck. He's managed to dope out the solution of a few crimes from having the facts told to him, and he's always thrown us off the trail by kidding us along with a lot o' hooey.

"This time he ain't going to kid nobody except himself. He's got the hiding place of those diamonds figured out, and he's going there to cop 'em off. Well, I'm going to just stick the ring around his neck, and let him cop. Then when he tries to swallow, he'll find that we'll just pry his jaw open an' make 'm spill the goods.

"See? He'll be just like the trained pelican. He'll get the stuff for us, then we'll shake him down and take all the credit for solving the case. After that we'll cinch the stolen goods rap on this guy, Leith, and fry the murderer. And if we can't find the murderer, we'll just hang the whole works on Leith, frame him for the murder, and fry him."

Beaver sighed.

"It sure sounds nice the way you tell it, Sarge, but I wish you'd find out what he's goin' to do with that there can ary before we get into this thing too deep. Somehow or other I got a hunch that can ary is goin' to be the big thing in this case . . ."

Sergeant Ackley's face turned red.

"That'll do, Beaver. You go ahead and obey orders, and don't ball things all up trying to get intellectual. You leave the thinkin' to me. You do the leg work.

"That's where you've always gummed the works before. You let this guy drag some red herring across the trail, and you go yapping off on that side trail while Leith gets his stuff across and ditches the swag.

"Now I don't want to offend you, but I'm in charge of this case, and I'll do the thinking. You beat it on back to Leith's apartment, and telephone me whenever anything breaks. I'm going to play this hotel end of it my way."

The undercover man started to say something, thought better of it.

"Yes, sir," he said, saluted, turned on his heel and walked out.

Lester Leith stared around him at the hotel rooms.

There was nothing to indicate that one of these rooms had been the scene of a gruesome murder. Hotels have press agents who thrust forward certain favorable facts and keep others very much in the background when it becomes necessary.

The newspaper accounts of the Cogley murder had only mentioned the location of the crime as having been in a "downtown hotel." They had been indefinite as to the name and location of this hotel and none of the accounts had so much as mentioned the floor on which the room had been situated, let alone the number of that room.

People have a superstitious dread of sleeping in a bed in which a murder has been committed, and some persons shun a hotel merely because a crime of violence has been committed under its roof.

The girl stared at Lester Leith with uncordial eyes.

"You're leavin' that connecting door unlocked?"

"Yes. I want to get into this room without going down the hallway. When you are in the room you can lock the door. But when you are absent I want to be free to come and go."

"And you want me to do my stuff?" asked the girl.

"Meaning?" inquired Lester Leith.

"Copping watches and that sort of stuff?"

He nodded.

"But you don't want me to do anything with 'em, hock 'em or anything like that?"

Lester Leith shook his head vigorously.

"No. I want you to give everything you take to me."

The girl sighed.

"Hell," she said, bitterly, "somebody's always taking the joy outa life. Here it is!"

And she tossed a hard object to the hotel dresser, an object that rattled, rolled, and sent forth sparkles of scintillating fire.

Lester Leith stared at it.

"Where did that come from?"

"The hotel clerk's necktie, of course," she said. "You didn't think I'd pass up anything like that, did you?"

Lester Leith stared at her in appreciative appraisal.

"Good work! Did you get anything else?"

She shook her head.

"I lifted the bellhop's watch, but it was a threshing machine movement, so I slipped it back again."

Lester Leith smiled, crossed the room to the telephone.

"Can you shed any tears?" he asked the young woman.

She shook her head.

"Never shed a sob in my life. I never regretted anything I did bad enough."

"Can you look meek and regretful?"

"Maybe."

"Okay. Get gloomy then, because I'm getting the clerk up here." Lester Leith took down the telephone receiver.

"The room clerk," he said.

There was a pause, then the click of a connection.

"A most unfortunate occurrence," muttered Lester Leith apologetically into the transmitter. "Please come up right away to room 407. I'll explain when you get here. Come at once."

He hung up the telephone, turned to the girl.

"Pull out the handkerchief and droop the eyes," he said.

She sat down on the edge of the bed, hung her head.

"Okay, but don't put it on too thick, or I'll giggle."

There was a knock at the door.

The clerk, white-faced, wide-eyed, stood on the threshold. Back of him was a lantern-jawed individual with pig eyes. Out in the corridor two men were engaged in a casual conversation of greeting, exclaiming that it was a small world after all, shaking hands with a fervor that was too exclamatory to be entirely genuine.

The clerk stepped into the room.

"Meet Mr. Moss," he said, nervously.

Lester Leith bowed.

"The house detective, I take it?"

The clerk cleared his throat nervously, but the big form of the man with the lantern jaw barged forward.

"Yeah," he growled, "I'm the house dick, if that means anything."

Lester Leith was suavely apologetic.

"So glad you came, so glad we can have this little conference. I'm sorry it all happened, but glad we can discuss it privately. You see, my niece is suffering from a nervous disorder. In short, gentlemen, she's a kleptomaniac. Her hands simply will not let other people's property alone. She's particularly hard on department stores."

The house detective glowered at the girl who sat on the edge of

the bed, head hung in shame, her hands clenched.

"Klepto—hell!" he exclaimed. "What you mean is that she's a shoplifter. I've heard of lots of these here cases of nervous troubles, but they're all the same. Now, don't you try to pull nothing in this hotel, because . . ."

"No, no!" exclaimed Lester Leith. "You don't understand. The girl has everything she could wish for, everything that money can buy. She simply has an irresistible impulse to steal. Now what I wish to do is to assure you that if there is anything taken from any of the guests of the hotel I will be financially responsible. I will make good the loss."

The house detective sneered.

"I had intended," continued Leith, "to have my niece examined by the best brain specialist in the city. But unfortunate symptoms have developed which make me realize that an acute attack is developing, and I cannot reach the brain specialist. I think, perhaps, your house physician would be able to handle the situation until we could secure a specialist."

The clerk fidgeted, looked at the house detective.

The house detective yawned.

Lester Leith extended his hand toward the clerk.

"Permit me," he said.

He opened the hand.

"Good God!" exclaimed the clerk, his hand darting to the knot of his tie, drifting down the glistening silk. "That's my stickpin!"

Lester Leith was smilingly suave.

"Exactly," he said.

The detective half-raised his body from the chair he had been occupying, then settled back. The clerk clutched at the diamond pin.

"Now," purred Lester Leith, "perhaps you will be good enough to call the house physician."

The clerk and the detective looked at each other.

The house detective carefully twisted his head to one side and closed a surreptitious eyelid.

"I think," he said, "I got a friend who's a specialist on this sort of a case. I'd better get him."

Lester Leith bowed politely.

"As you say, gentlemen. I will endeavor to keep my niece under restraint until the physician arrives. I hope I don't have to confine her in an institution. In the meantime, remember that I will be responsible for any loss which occurs in the hotel. And perhaps it would be advisable to notify the occupants of the adjoining rooms that there is an ... er ... unfortunate case located here. They could be asked to report promptly on anything they might find ... er ... mislaid."

The clerk and the house detective shuffled out. The door closed. The girl raised an unpenitent face and grinned.

"Now what?" she asked.

Lester Leith regarded her gravely.

"If you had to build an ironclad, copper-riveted alibi, what would you do?"

She puckered her lips, narrowed her eyes in thought.

"Absolutely ironclad?" she asked.

Leith nodded.

"Well," she said, "I've pulled a stunt once along that line that ain't never been improved on. I let a cop who was pretty well up in the big time date me up. He was married. It would have been a swell alibi if I'd had to use it; only I didn't have to use it."

Leith took out a wallet.

"I think," he observed, "it would be a fine time to start building an alibi."

She took the bill he handed to her, whistled, thrust the money down the top of her stocking, and grinned.

"I like," she said. "You'd rate a goodbye kiss if I hadn't just smeared my mouth all up pretty for the clerk. As it is, you're a good guy. G'bye."

She went out the door, as graceful as a slipping shadow. The hallway seemed to be unduly active. Three men were strolling along. A fourth man was arguing with a porter about the cost of transporting a trunk.

Lester Leith smiled.

He locked the door, walked through Room 407 to Room 405, took a small leather packet from his pocket, extracted a tiny drill. With this drill he bored a very small hole in the panel of the communicating doorway which led to Room 403.

When this hole was completed, Lester Leith applied his eye, saw that the room was dark and vacant, nodded sagely, and took additional tools from the leather case.

After some ten seconds the bolt twisted and the communicating door swung open.

The room showed that it had been occupied for some time. The furnishings were those of the ordinary hotel bedroom, but there were individual touches—photographs on the walls, a pennant or two, a sofa cushion, and a special reading lamp.

Lester Leith noted them, noted also that the clothing had been unpacked from the suitcases and the bulky trunk, and placed in the closet of the room and in the drawers of the bureau. The massive trunk was presumably empty, but it was tightly locked.

Lester Leith nodded, as though he was finding exactly what he had expected, and set to work. He dragged the bulky trunk into Room 405, then into Room 407. He then went back to Room 403, pulled the clothes out of the bureau drawers, took the suitcases, the reading lamp, the sofa cushion, even the photographs on the walls. He denuded the room of every single item of individual furniture.

Then he retired once more to Room 405, locked the communicating door, applied his eye to the peephole he had gimleted in the panel, and waited.

He had over an hour to wait.

His room was dark, save for such light as came through the windows, light which ebbed and flowed with the regularity of clockwork, marking the clicking on and off of some of the neon signs which were on the roofs of adjoining buildings. The noise of the side street came to his ears in a confused roar. The blare of automobile horns, impatiently trying to move traffic, the muttered undertone which marks the restless motion and conversation of hustling throngs, all blended into an undertone of sound.

Lester Leith remained at his post, silently observant.

His vigil was at last rewarded.

A key clicked in the lock of 403. The door swung open, showing light from the corridor, the silhouette of a chunky man. The door closed. The bolt clicked, and the light switched on.

Lester Leith could see the look of stunned amazement on the face of the man in the adjoining room as he discovered what had happened.

The man was in his early forties, alert, broad-shouldered, self-sufficiently aggressive. But now his self-sufficience melted away from him. His face writhed with conflicting emotions. He glanced back of him at the door through which he had just entered, then at the doorway where Leith watched.

For some ten seconds he stood motionless, apparently adjusting himself. Then his hand slipped beneath the armpit of his coat, extracted a snubnosed automatic, and he tiptoed toward the door behind which Lester Leith crouched.

Softly, silently, he twisted the knob of that door, and found that the door was locked. Then he stepped back, letting light once more come through the small hole Leith had bored.

The man walked to the telephone in the corner of the room, took down the receiver.

"Room clerk," he rasped.

The man recounted his troubles to the hotel clerk. Lester Leith could not catch all the words, but he could hear the tone, and gather the import of the conversation. Then the man in the adjoining room hung up the telephone, crossed swiftly to the window, pulled down the shade, went to the door, made certain it was locked, looked at the transom, making sure it was closed.

He secured a chair, stood on it, and unscrewed the brass screws from one of the wall lighting fixtures. The fixture lifted out, disclosing a cunningly designed hiding place. In that hollowed-out hiding place, at one side of the spliced electric wires which conveyed current to the wall fixture, was a chamois bag.

The man opened this bag with fingers that quivered, and gave an exclamation of relief. Then he hastily closed the bag, pushed it back into its hiding place, paused for a moment's consideration, and replaced the screws in the wall fixture. He got down from the chair, moved it so that its back was against the wall, unlocked the outer door, stepped into the corridor, and closed the door, locking it from the outside.

Lester Leith worked with incredible rapidity.

He opened the communicating door, glided into the opposite room, pulled the chair back to the place directly underneath the wall fixture, untwisted the screws with a screwdriver, opened the chamois bag.

There were many gems in that bag, gems that sparkled and glittered. But Leith was careful to take only a limited number—very few, but those few the best. Then he closed the bag, pushed it back into its recess in the wall, screwed back the light fixture, replaced the chair, and slipped from the room into his own room, number 405.

He thrust a cautious head out of the window.

The fire escape stretched down the side of the building like a black ribbon. Three men were seated in the alley underneath that fire escape.

Another man sprawled on the seat of a truck that was parked a few feet to one side.

Leith abandoned the window.

He tiptoed to the door of his room, pulled up a chair, climbed on the chair, stared out through a crack in the transom.

He could see a section of the hallway.

Two men, wearing the uniform of bellhops, yet seemingly strangely mature for bellboys, were walking up and down, their manner that of sentries on duty. A burly porter, who would have never been taken as a porter save for the cap he wore, was seated on a trunk. A well-dressed man with alert eyes was standing far down at one end of the corridor.

There was no possibility of escape from Room 405.

And, as Leith stared, three purposeful men emerged from the

elevator and moved toward his room. They were the clerk, the house detective, and the self-sufficiently belligerent man who occupied 403.

Even as Leith stood there, they started to knock on the door, and, as they knocked, the two mature bellboys crowded forward, the porter jumped down from his seat on the trunk, and the gimlet-eyed man at the end of the hall moved forward on rubber-soled feet.

Lester Leith stepped from the chair and went into action.

What had been a polite knock was repeated more loudly. Then it was repeated again with two-fisted emphasis.

"What is it?" called Lester Leith in the blurred tones of one who has been aroused from slumber.

"Open this door," said the hoarse voice of the house detective. "We want to talk with you. This is Moss, the house dick."

"Oh," said Lester Leith. "Just a minute."

And he jumped on the bed to give a creaking noise to the springs, then let his feet thud to the floor.

Yet it was several seconds before he opened the door.

His hair was tousled. His eyes were blinking. His collar was wrinkled and his coat was off. There was an air of dazed perplexity about him.

"... lay down for a minute," he explained sheepishly. "Must've dropped off."

He sucked in a prodigious yawn.

Moss lowered his broad shoulders and pushed past Lester Leith into the room. Directly behind the detective, walking with a certain cat-footed manner, his right hand hovering near the lapel of his coat, his eyes narrowed, came the occupant of 403. The clerk was a tardy third in the procession.

One of the mature bellboys cleared his throat suggestively.

The house detective turned, called over his shoulder:

"Come in here, Joe."

The bellboy pushed eagerly forward, forcing the clerk into a quicker step.

Lester Leith seemed more awake now.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously.

The house detective switched on the light, looked the room over.

"Whère's the dame?" he asked.

"You mean my niece?" asked Lester Leith.

"You know who I mean. She went out. Did she come back?" It was the bellboy who answered.

"Naw," he said, "she didn't come back."

"Certain?" asked the house detective.

"Sure," said the bellboy.

Lester Leith let his eyes widen.

"Why," he exclaimed with a simulation of surprise, "you're a detective!"

The man who was dressed as a bellboy snorted.

"Let's take a look around," he said.

They moved forward, a compact knot, save for the squat man who occupied room 403. He gravitated slightly to one side.

"All the personal belongings from my room," he said, "have been stolen."

Lester Leith let his jaw sag.

"Good heavens!" he said.

The detectives strode through the connecting bathroom, walked into 407.

"This the stuff?" asked the man who had posed as a bellhop.

The occupant of room 403 stared at the assortment.

"Good Lord, yes!" he exclaimed. "How did it get here?"

Lester Leith joined in the exclamation, his tone one of dismay.

"Good heavens!" he groaned. "She's had an attack!"

"Yeah," sneered the detective. "Ain't that too bad!"

Lester Leith turned to the occupant of Room 403.

"But I'm responsible," he said. "I'm financially responsible. Only I want to know just what I am responsible for. Here, in the presence of these officers, we will open this baggage and list the contents."

There was a sudden swirl of motion behind Lester Leith. Two hands clamped down on his arms. Glittering bracelets of steel clicked around his wrists.

"Yeah," sneered the man who had posed as bellhop, "and we'll just keep you out of mischief while we're making the examination."

Lester Leith stiffened. His face mirrored dismay.

"Listen, officer," he said. "I can't explain, but you'll ruin some very precious plans I have if you do not remove those handcuffs. I demand that you release me."

The detectives joined in a guffaw.

"Ruining plans of crooks is one of the best things I do," said the detective.

"No, no. You don't understand. Call Sergeant Ackley. Get him here at once. I demand that this baggage be opened. And I want Sergeant Ackley here . . ."

The squat occupant of Room 403 moved easily toward the door.

"I'll open it fast enough," he promised. "But I've got to go to my room to get my keys."

He took swift steps toward the door.

"No, no!" yelled Lester Leith. "Stop him. Get Ackley! Get Ackley. I can't make any accusation while that baggage is unopened, but I want Sergeant . . ."

The detective swung his right fist.

The blow made contact with Lester Leith on the jaw. Leith slumped to the floor, inert.

"Hell," said the detective. "I didn't hit him hard. He must be playing possum. I didn't want any more of his damned bawling. Where's the sarge?"

"Coming," said a voice from the corridor.

A compact body of men moved into the room.

"Better frisk him," said someone.

"He'll keep," chuckled one of the detectives. "Let's look around."

"Maybe we went a little too fast, Joe," cautioned one of the men. "Orders was to give him enough rope to spring his stuff, and then clamp down on him."

"Well," countered the individual addressed as Joe, "he had enough rope, and he was pulling his stuff, or I miss my guess."

Hands went through Lester Leith's clothing.

"Nothing here," said a voice.

"Look the room over," ordered someone else. "Close that door. We don't want a crowd in on this. Where the hell's the sarge? He was sticking around for a while. Then he said he had a sick friend he had to see, and left a telephone number where we could call him if anything broke."

"You call him?" asked the clerk.

"Yeah. Soon as the guy from 403 made the squawk. Say, where is that bird?"

"Gone to get his keys."

"Well, we better go down there, and . . . here's the sarge now."

There were purposeful steps, the banging of the door as it slammed open, then the voice of Sergeant Ackley.

"Well," he exclaimed, "what's up! See you got the bracelets on him. Did you catch him with the goods?"

"We caught him right enough," said the voice of the man called Joe. "I don't know just what he was pulling, but . . ."

Lester Leith stirred, moved his eyes, groaned.

"Open the man's trunk," he said, and then slumped back into silence.

"What happened to him?" asked Sergeant Ackley.

"Oh, he was squawking, and I cracked him an easy one an' he wilted."

Sergeant Ackley grunted.

"Better be careful. He's a smooth one. And he keeps a good lawyer. If we haven't got the goods on him . . ."

"We got the goods on him right enough," said Joe.

"Open the trunk anyway," said Sergeant Ackley. "Guy's gone for the keys," said Joe.

There was a period of shuffling silence. Someone scraped a match and lit a cigarette. Then someone coughed.

"Say, where is that guy?" asked someone.

Lester Leith moaned, twisted.

"Don't let him get away," he pleaded in a groaning whisper. "I tried to get you, Sergeant . . . "

Sergeant Ackley suddenly exploded into action.

"Go grab that bird, Joe! Bill, get that trunk open. This looks like a job that's been bungled. That guy in 403 . . . Get started!"

There came a scurrying motion, swift voices, shouted comments. Then a report was called down the hallway. "Went down the stairs. Thought you sent him, Joe. He said you did!"

Profanity spouted from Sergeant Ackley's lips.

"Get that guy! He's the murderer and the gem thief. Hurry up. Throw out the dragnet. Give the signal. Close the block!"

And he ran to the window, flung it open, raised a police whistle to his lips, blew a shrill blast.

Lester Leith sat up.

For a man who had been knocked out, he seemed to be in serene possession of his senses.

"I warned you, Sergeant," he said. "Will someone please give me a cigarette?"

Sergeant Ackley flung back from the window, glowered at the handcuffed figure on the floor.

"Hell!" he said.

Lester Leith talked fluently.

"We've had our differences, Sergeant, but I thought I could patch them up by putting a feather in your cap. I figured the murdered man's trunk had held the gems, but that the trunk had proven obstinate. The murderer, however, would never have carried the

whole trunk with him unless something had happened to make that the only course possible.

"He'd killed the gem thief and was opening the trunk when something happened to alarm him. That something must have been the arrival of the officers. That meant the murderer was trapped in the room when the officers were demanding an entrance.

"He'd previously forced the window over the fire escape to make it seem like an outside job. But he couldn't have escaped through that window because it's obvious that he must have taken the trunk with him.

"Therefore there was only one escape he had—through the communicating room and into his own room. If my theory was correct, the murderer had been at work on the trunk when the officers banged on the door. He didn't want to leave his loot, so he shouldered the trunk, slipped into 405 and through it into his own room and locked the door.

"Then he had to do something with the trunk. He realized there'd probably be a search for it. So he hid it in the most obvious place in the world—remember 'The Purloined Letter' by Poe? He simply put the stolen trunk, which was small, inside his own trunk which was large!

"That meant he had to wait for a later time to tackle the secret combination. It also meant that he had to be an old resident of the hotel, both for the purpose of avoiding suspicion, as well as to have been sufficiently familiar with the hotel to know that the rooms he wanted for his victim, which would adjoin his room, would have an opening on the fire escape—"

Lester Leith was interrupted by a man bursting into the room.

"There's a secret hiding place in 403 back of a wall fixture. A guy jerked it out by the roots, and . . ."

And that man, in turn, was interrupted by the rattle of gunfire from the street.

There were more than a dozen revolver shots, exploding in rapid succession. Then the wail of a siren, the sound of shouts, a police whistle blowing frantically.

"They've got him!" exclaimed Joe.

The men rushed toward the window.

"Go see what happened, Joe!" rasped Sergeant Ackley.

Men piled out of the room.

Left behind, Sergeant Ackley glowered at the handcuffed figure.

"I think I've got you this time!" he said.

Lester Leith sighed.

"I did so want to give you an olive branch by letting you take the credit for capturing the murderer. And then you had to spoil it all. And one of your men struck me, while I was handcuffed! An unprovoked, brutal police assault."

Sergeant Ackley grinned.

"Tell it to the jury," he said.

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No," he said, "I shall tell it to the newspapers!"

Sergeant Ackley began to look worried.

He surveyed the room with suspicious eyes, strode to the covered bird cage, ripped off the cover. A startled canary hopped about the cage, chirped indignantly. Ackley cursed the bird, kicked the cage.

A man rushed into the room.

"Bagged him!" he exclaimed. "He was shot half a dozen times. They closed in on him and he tried to smoke his way out. Dead now, but he had enough life left when they got to him to admit that he did the job. And he had the loot with him."

There was disappointment in Sergeant Ackley's voice.

"Had the loot with him!"

"Yep, in a small chamois bag that he'd kept hidden in the space back of the wall light. He told 'em how he did the job. Knew Cogley was coming here to the Palace. Knew he was going to keep an appointment with a fence. So this bird reserved the room he wanted, trapped Cogley, and tipped off the fence the bulls were hep. That kept the fence away.

"The guy sneaked into Cogley's room when he was washing up, cracked him on the dome, tied and gagged him, intended to get the stuff and beat it. But Cogley came to, recognized him, so he croaked Cogley, then started after the trunk when he heard the officers coming. He dragged the trunk into his own room, and . . ."

"Never mind all that," snapped Sergeant Ackley. "I had deduced that much myself. I would have arrested this man only I wanted to use him to bait a trap for Leith. But did the police recover *all* the gems?"

"The whole sack!" gloated the detective.

"Hell!" said Sergeant Ackley.

Lester Leith smiled.

"Now can I have a cigarette?" he asked.

Sergeant Ackley walked to the door, slammed it shut.

"Listen, this guy never had the chance to check all the jewels.

-.

There were a lot of diamonds in that haul. Maybe some of 'em got away. Let's search this room and the two adjoining. And I mean search 'em. No maybe about it. Take 'em to pieces. Rip out the wall fixtures, X-ray the furniture. This bird Leith is too smooth to have let anything like that slip through his fingers."

They got busy and searched, and the net result of that search was to uncover nothing at all. Never had rooms been subjected to such a search, and Lester Leith himself helped make the search complete. Whenever the police seemed to be overlooking a single cranny or corner, Lester Leith would point it out.

"The brass in the bed is hollow, Sergeant," he suggested. And: "There might have been a hole bored in the curtain pole in the closet."

Those suggestions were received in sullen silence, but acted upon with alacrity. The morning was sending its chill fingers through the air when the officers finished. A clock struck two somewhere. Sergeant Ackley ran doubtful fingers through his matted hair and surveyed the wreckage.

"Well," he said, "they ain't here."

Lester Leith grinned.

Sergeant Ackley scowled at him.

"But you still got some explaining to do. I've half a mind to throw you in on suspicion and let you explain how you happened to be trailing this crook around. You *intended* to hijack him, even if we did beat you to it!"

Lester Leith looked hurt.

"Tut, tut, Sergeant! I was doing you a favor. My solution was only academic."

"All right, boys," Sergeant Ackley said wearily. "Let'm go."

One of the detectives had a bright idea.

"The woman accomplice," he said, "the one that posed as his niece. She was away . . ."

Sergeant Ackley hastily interposed an interruption.

"Let her out," he growled. "She's got an ironclad alibi, one that don't need to enter into the case. I checked it up myself. That's what delayed me getting here."

The detective's voice held a trace of admiration.

"Gee, Sergeant, you sure work fast!"

"That's the way to work!" he said. Then his eye fell on the canary in the huge cage.

"Say," he demanded, "what the hell's the idea of that bird?"

"A very valuable bird," said Lester Leith. "A Peruvian bloodhound-canary. I was hoping to try him out."

Sergeant Ackley stared at the cage.

"False bottom, maybe," he said.

The detectives shook their heads.

"Nothing doing, Sergeant," said Joe. "Every inch of it has been checked."

Sergeant Ackley fixed his moody eyes upon the canary.

"Birds have craws, boys, and maybe there's a fine stone stuffed down this bird's craw. Wring his neck and let's have a look!"

Lester Leith's voice suddenly became ominous.

"Sergeant, I've let you ride rough-shod over my rights long enough. If you take the life of that canary, I'll have you arrested for cruelty to animals, and, by George, I'll spend a hundred thousand dollars prosecuting the charge! That's a very rare species of canary, and very delicate. It's worth thousands!"

Sergeant Ackley's face broke into a smile.

"Now," he gloated, "we're getting close to home. Pull that bird out here and let's see what he's got inside of him."

One of the detectives was more humane.

"We've got the house physician's X-ray machine," he said. "We can use that just as well, and then this guy won't have any squawk." "Okay," said Sergeant Ackley. "Give 'm the once-over."

The bird was held under the X-ray. The result was the same as the rest of the search—negative.

"All right," said Sergeant Ackley, "we've solved the Cogley murder. That's a good night's work. Let's get home, boys, it's getting along—"

He fished mechanical fingers in his watch pocket, then let his jaw sag, his voice trail into silence as those searching fingers encountered nothing.

"My watch!" he said.

The men stared at him.

His hand darted to his necktie.

"And my pin! Good heavens! What'll my wife . . ."

He paused.

In the moment of tense silence which followed, Lester Leith's drawling voice carried a cryptic comment.

"I'm glad the young lady has an alibi," he said.

Sergeant Ackley's face purpled. "Shut up!" he bellowed. "I remember now, I left my pin and my watch on my dresser at home.

Let's go, boys. Get out of here. Leave the damned slicker and his canary!" And Sergeant Ackley pushed his men out into the hall, showing a sudden haste to terminate the entire affair.

Edward H. Beaver, undercover operative of the police department, detailed to act as valet to Lester Leith, suspected hijacker of stolen jewels, held up a grayish feather between his thumb and forefinger, and stared reproachfully at Ackley.

"I told you, Sergeant, that he never did anything without a reason. That canary, now . . ."

Sergeant Ackley banged his feet down from the desk. His face was distorted with rage.

"Beaver, you're detailed on that suspect. You live with him, hear everything he says, know everything he does, and yet the guy keeps pulling things right under your nose. It's an evidence of criminal incompetency on your part."

"But," interpolated the spy, "I suggested this about the canary before, sir. I suggested that the solution of the whole affair might be . . ."

"You're all wet, Beaver. I even X-rayed the blasted canary. He couldn't have had a thing to do with it!"

"Yes, Sergeant," said the spy, meekly, a little too meekly, perhaps; "but I found this feather in the bottom of the cage."

"Well, what of it?"

"It's not the color of the canary, sir. It's not a canary feather."

Sergeant Ackley stared, his eyes slowly widening.

"Well, what sort of feather is it?"

"I had it classified at the Zoo. It's a feather from a pigeon, one of the sort known as a homing pigeon. It's barely possible that covered cage contained half a dozen homing pigeons, besides the canary, trained to go to a certain particular spot immediately upon being released. And then Lester Leith could have picked out a dozen of the most valuable stones, slipped them into sacks that were already attached to the birds' legs, tossed the birds out of the window, and then later on, gone to the place where they had flown and picked up the diamonds. After all, we have no assurance except what Leith said that the cage contained only a canary. The cage was always covered. It may have contained homing pigeons, and . . ."

Sergeant Ackley glowered, bellowed his comment.

"Well, that was your business! You're a hell of a spy if you can't tip us off to what's going on!"

"I warned you, Sergeant, that the canary was the key to the crime. But you overlooked the bird in the hand to go chasing off after . . ."

Sergeant Ackley's chair scraped back along the floor as the big bulk of the sergeant got to its feet, as the sergeant's face glowered down upon his subordinate.

"That'll do, Beaver! Your suspicions are absurd, your statements incorrect, and your deductions too late. This department is interested in getting results, not in diagnosing failures. Get out!"

"Yes, Sergeant," said Edward H. Beaver.

"And keep your mouth shut, Beaver!" warned the sergeant as the spy's hand was on the doorknob.

The retort was a grunt, inarticulate, but hardly respectful.

Then the door banged.

Sergeant Ackley raised a hand to his necktie. His fingers caressed the smooth expanse where his diamond stickpin had formerly glistened. That spot was now bare.

Sergeant Ackley's face was twisted into an expression which was neither prepossessing nor pleasant.

A THOUSAND TO ONE

Lester Leith stood before the mirror, adjusting the white tie of his evening clothes with the deft fingers of an expert craftsman. Behind him, the police undercover man, who posed as his valet, held the tailed coat with a characteristic air of obsequious servitude.

Having adjusted the tie to suit his fancy, Leith permitted the valet to assist him with his coat, and the big undercover man made a great show of whisking a brush over the shoulders in a last, deferential gesture.

"How is it, Scuttle?" Leith asked.

"Very good, sir."

Leith yawned, consulted his wrist watch. "Well," he said, "there's a good half-hour before I need to leave."

"Yes, sir. A cocktail, sir?"

"Oh, I think not, Scuttle. Just a cigarette and a book."

The spy, moving his huge bulk upon self-effacing tiptoes, eased over to the library table, and surreptitiously folded the evening paper so that the photograph of a smiling young man, holding a white feather between his thumb and forefinger, would be visible to anyone standing near the table.

Leith strolled over to the bookcase, selected a book, and turned back toward his favorite reclining chair. He stopped to stare at the folded newspaper.

"What the devil's this, Scuttle?" he asked.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. Rather an interesting case, sir. A man who habitually carries in his wallet a white feather."

"A white feather. Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. He says it brings him luck because it teaches him prudence. Whenever he's inclined to plunge in a poker game, he looks in his wallet, sees the white feather, and is convinced that it's prudent to play a conservative game."

Lester Leith frowned. "It sounds like a silly system to me, Scuttle." "Yes, sir."

"A man never makes anything by being conservative, Scuttle. He makes his pile by plunging. After he's made his pile, he becomes conservative."

Lester Leith stared again at the photograph of the thin man with a sardonic smile whose thumb and forefinger held the fluffy white feather up against the dark background formed by the iron bars of a jail door. "Who is he, Scuttle?"

"Rodney Alcott, sir."

"And what's he done to get himself in jail and his picture in the newspaper?"

The spy's eyes glittered as he saw that Leith was taking the bait. "The police don't know, sir."

"I see," Leith said. "Typical police methods. They don't know what the man's done—therefore, they throw him in jail. That's a jail door in the background of the photograph, is it not, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

Leith concentrated his attention on the white feather shown in the picture. "How long has he had this peculiar pocket piece, Scuttle?"

"He says for more than a year. It's always in his wallet."

Lester Leith put down his book, and walked across his apartment to stand smoking in front of the window. The big police spy watched him with glittering, anxious eyes.

"What do the police think he's done?" Lester Leith asked at length, without taking his eyes from the view which was framed in the

window—a vista of tall, lighted buildings in the foreground, a penthouse apartment, and, far below, a crawling stream of automobiles whose headlights made them seem like a procession of fireflies.

The spy said, "The police think that he changed twenty-five onethousand-dollar bills into twenty-five one-dollar bills."

Leith slowly turned. His eyes were whimsical. "Rather a good percentage, Scuttle," he said. "A thousand to one. Who'd he shortchange?"

"The police aren't certain. They think it may have been Judge August Peer Mandeville."

Leith frowned. "Isn't he a federal judge, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

Leith glanced at his watch. "Scuttle," he said, "I have twenty-five minutes. Tell me the story briefly, and I'll listen. But mind you, Scuttle, I'm just listening to pass the time. I don't want Sergeant Ackley to think this is another time when I'm outguessing the police. depriving a criminal of his ill-gotten gains, and passing the profits on to the unfortunate."

"I understand, sir . . . Judge Mandeville is presiding over the patent litigation involving the patents of the Click-Fast Shutter Company. A week ago Rodney Alcott approached Mr. Boyen, the president of the Click-Fast Shutter Company, and said that for twenty-five thousand dollars Judge Mandeville would give them a favorable decision."

"And how did Alcott fit into the picture, Scuttle?"

"Apparently, he's a close personal friend of Judge Mandeville."

"I see, Scuttle. Go ahead. What happened?"

"You've heard of Charles Betcher, the famous private detective, head of the national agency which—"

"I've heard of him," Leith said.

"Well, it seems that the Click-Fast Shutter Company was suspicious. They thought Alcott might be trying to feather his own nest, or that Judge Mandeville might take the money and fail to give them a favorable decision after all. The shutter company wanted to prove Judge Mandeville had received the money.

"Mr. Boyen called in Charles Betcher and asked his advice. Betcher decided to let Alcott go ahead, but to install detectographs so that every word of his conversation with Judge Mandeville could

be taken down on wax cylinders."

Lester Leith slipped a cigarette from the thin, hammered-silver cigarette case which he took from his hip pocket. He tapped the end upon a polished thumbnail and said, "Then they'd let him know they held the records, and own the judge. What happened?"

"They didn't play it that way, sir. That's what they should have done, but the Click-Fast Shutter Company didn't like Judge Mandeville. They decided they'd let him accept the bribe money and then arrest him.

"Betcher took control personally. He came to town, got a suite in a downtown hotel. He and Boyen gave Alcott twenty-five thousand dollars—twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills. They had the numbers on the bills listed, and they didn't let Alcott out of their sight after they gave him the money. He went directly to the judge's chambers, and the detectograph picked up the conversation."

"Was the judge crooked?" Lester Leith asked.

"No one knows, sir," the spy said. "The detectograph recorded conversation in which Alcott said, 'Okay, Judge, I got the money. I had some difficulty getting them to give it to me, but it's all here.' And then the money was passed over. Alcott came to the door and shook hands with Judge Mandeville. The detectives and police swooped down on Mandeville. They searched him and found a sealed envelope containing twenty-five new one-dollar bills. Mandeville swore this money was the return of a personal loan which he'd made to Alcott."

"And they searched Alcott?" Lester Leith asked.

"Oh, yes, of course, sir."

"And what did they find?"

"Nothing."

"And what does Alcott say?"

"Alcott swears that he gave the twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills to Judge Mandeville, that the judge must have smelled a rat and managed to ditch the money."

Lester Leith crossed over to stand above the table, looking down at the newspaper photograph. "I notice Alcott has a bandaged head," he said. "Did he resist arrest?"

"No, sir. That wasn't done by the police, sir. That's the result of an automobile accident."

"I see," Lester Leith said musingly. "Well, it's very interesting, Scuttle. The Click-Fast Shutter Company has paid out twenty-five thousand dollars. The net result has been to antagonize Judge Mandeville, whether he was bribed or not, and probably to have cost them their chance of winning the lawsuit."

The police spy said, "Mr. Boyen, the president of the Click-Fast

Shutter Company, is furious. He's offered Mr. Betcher a five-thousand-dollar reward to prove what happened."

Lester Leith raised his eyebrows. "Why Betcher?" he asked.

"He seems to feel that Betcher is the best detective in the country."

Lester Leith smiled. "After his experience," he said, "you must give Mr. Boyen credit for a great amount of blind, loyal faith, Scuttle. I take it Charles Betcher arranged the details of payment."

"That's right, sir."

"Exactly how was the money paid?"

"President Boyen took the money from his pocket, said to Charles Betcher, 'Here are the twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills.' Betcher and Boyen together copied the numbers, while Alcott sat on the bed, watching. Then Betcher picked up the money and handed it to Alcott. Alcott folded the bills and started to put them in his pocket. Then he asked for an envelope. He says he didn't even bother to look at the money. He says he watched them copying the numbers from the bills and saw the money then, but that when Betcher handed him the money he just took it for granted it was the same money. He says Betcher switched it."

"And Mandeville didn't count the money?" Leith asked incredulously.

"The money which was given Judge Mandeville was in a sealed envelope," the valet said. "The judge had just torn open the edge of the envelope and taken out the bills when the detectives and police made the raid."

Leith continued to study the sardonically grinning countenance of Rodney Alcott, as depicted in the newspaper. "Any other photographs of him, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. The evening paper has a photograph—a snapshot taken by a young lady friend, a Gertrude Pell, with whom he was quite friendly."

Leith frowned at the picture which the spy produced from the late evening edition. "When was this taken, Scuttle?" he asked.

"On the afternoon just prior to the call on Judge Mandeville. He and Gertrude Pell were automobile riding, and she took this photograph."

Lester Leith bent over the photograph to study it closely. Abruptly he straightened and looked at his watch. The spy started to say something, but Lester Leith motioned him to silence.

Standing gracefully erect, Lester Leith moved his cigarette in a little series of gestures, as though tracing out the intricate pattern

of some jigsaw puzzle. A slow smile twitched the corners of his mouth.

"Scuttle," he said, "get me a package of linen bandage, a five-yard spool of two-inch adhesive tape, a long string of imitation pearls, half a dozen rings with imitation diamonds, a pair of very dark smoked glasses—the darkest you can buy. And I'll want a white wig, a false mustache—a cane, a crutch, and a white feather—a fluffy, white feather from the breast of a pure white goose."

The spy stared at him with wide, incredulous eyes. "Good heavens, sir!" he exclaimed.

"And I'll want the feather first, Scuttle. I'll need that tonight. Have it put on my dresser in an envelope. I'll be home early—shortly after midnight."

The dazed spy took a pencil and paper from his pocket, scribbled a hurried memo.

"You've got those things written down, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

Leith interrupted. "But me no buts, Scuttle. Just get those things—particularly the feather. Without the feather, I can't use any of the other stuff."

"But I don't understand, sir. I-"

Leith silenced him with a gesture. "My time, Scuttle, is up," he said.

Leith started for the door, and the valet rushed to hand him his topcoat, hat, and stick. In the doorway, Leith turned. "The imitation diamond rings, Scuttle," he said, "are for a woman."

"Yes, sir," the spy said. "What sort of a woman, may I ask, sir?"

Lester Leith paused long enough to slit his eyes in thoughtful concentration. Then he said, almost dreamily, "A woman who knows the world, Scuttle, a woman of around sixty-five with gray hair and twinkling eyes that haven't forgotten how to smile, a woman with a sense of humor, a broad mind, depleted fortunes, and a background of vaudeville or stock-company acting. I want an old trouper. No, no, Scuttle. Don't bother. I'll find her myself."

And Leith stepped out to the elevator, slamming the door behind him.

Sergeant Ackley stared across the table at the undercover man. "That's all of it, Beaver?" he asked.

"That's all of it."

"I don't understand it," Sergeant Ackley said. "There must be

something more which you haven't told me, Scuttle, something that you've overlooked, something—"

The undercover man scraped back his chair as he jumped to his feet. "Not from you," he shouted. "I won't take it!"

"Won't take what?" Sergeant Ackley said, staring in bewilderment at the undercover man's angry countenance.

"That damn name of Scuttle," the spy roared. "Leith calls me Scuttle because he says I look like a reincarnated pirate. He Scuttles me this and Scuttles me that. I get so damn sick of it—"

"Sit down," Sergeant Ackley said. "That's an order." Slowly the undercover man sank back in the chair.

Sergeant Ackley said, "We have no time to waste with petty personalities in this department. You're working on a big case. It's a case that's taken altogether too long. We want this man Leith behind bars. He's outwitted you on a whole string of cases. He's going to outwit you again unless you can give me a better idea of what happened."

The undercover man sighed wearily. "I'm the one he's outwitted," he said sullenly.

"Yes, you," Sergeant Ackley retorted. "Give me the facts, and I'll put them together, work out a solution, and catch him red-handed, but you're always overlooking something significant."

"Well, I haven't overlooked anything this time," the spy said. "I've given you everything."

Sergeant Ackley puckered his forehead into a frown. "Well," he said slowly, "if you have, there's something about those photographs—wait a minute! I have it!"

"What?" the spy asked.

"The way Alcott is holding that feather," Sergeant Ackley said, his voice quivering with excitement. "Can't you see it, Beaver? The whole thing lies in the way Alcott is holding that feather!"

"What do you mean?"

"Alcott got that dough," Sergeant Ackley said, "and ditched it. He ditched it in some place of concealment where it could be picked up by a confederate. Probably he had a hole in his pocket. He put the money in his pocket and stood over a ventilator or in a dark corner of the room, and dropped it. He knew that he'd be searched and arrested, but he figured he could get the newspapers to give him a play if he had a white feather in his wallet, and claimed that it was a lucky talisman.

"Notice what happened. When he was taken to the jail and

searched, they found this white feather in his wallet. He begged them to be permitted to keep that white feather with him. Well, the sergeant at the desk was too smart for that. He kept the feather, because it's against the rules to let prisoners keep their personal property in the cells with them, but, of course, he told the newspapers about it, and, of course, the newspapers, wanting some unusual angle of human interest on Alcott, fell for the thing, lock, stock, and barrel.

"The property clerk dug out the feather, and Alcott had his picture taken. Notice the peculiar manner in which he's holding the feather in his thumb and forefinger, with the ring finger bent down, and the middle finger and the little finger sticking up. That's a signal, Beaver."

Beaver bent over the newspaper photographs which Leith had seen, and which were now lying on Sergeant Ackley's table. His manner fell considerably short of enthusiastic assent.

"Of course, that's it," Sergeant Ackley said, gloatingly. "You give me the facts, Beaver, and I'll put them together!"

The undercover man said, "If it's a signal, it's a signal in code, and Leith wouldn't know that code."

"Don't kid yourself," Ackley retorted. "His mind is like greased lightning."

"But I don't think—Well, it didn't look to me as though he'd—It was this *other* picture that got him interested."

"What other one?"

"The one that was taken from a snapshot."

"Oh, that," Sergeant Ackley said contemptuously. "That was before Alcott met Charles Betcher to complete arrangements for paying over the money. That picture doesn't mean anything."

The undercover man regarded it in thoughtful concentration.

Sergeant Ackley said, "You have to admit, Beaver, that it was something in the pictures, something Leith saw, something that the others wouldn't see. Now this theory of mine—"

"Look!" Beaver exclaimed.

"What?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"The bandage on the man's head!" Beaver exclaimed.

"What about the bandage?" Sergeant Ackley asked. "He was injured in an automobile accident."

Beaver said, "That bandage is the place where the money is concealed! Don't you get it? He had the twenty-five one-dollar bills planted in his pocket. When they handed him the twenty-five one-

thousand-dollar bills, he simply made an excuse to get his hand up near his head and slipped the bills up under the bandage. They searched him, but they didn't think of pulling off that bandage!"

Sergeant Ackley's piggy little eyes glittered with sudden interest. "They may not have searched that bandage at that," he said. "But I don't know what makes you think Leith had any clue to—"

"Don't you see it?" Beaver shouted. "Look at the two photographs. Here's the one that was taken after he was booked. See the bandages? Look at the strips of adhesive tape. See? There are four cross strips of adhesive on the bandage in the picture taken in the afternoon and only three in the one taken after he was booked."

Sergeant Ackley stared at the photograph. His eyes became wide and fascinated. "Holy smoke!" he said.

"Get the sketch?" Beaver said excitedly. "Leith is planning on putting up bail and getting Alcott out of jail. He's going to drug him or something, and while Alcott is unconscious, Leith will rip that bandage off. Then he's going to put a new one in its place. Alcott won't even know he's been robbed. It will have that clever, artistic, baffling touch that characterizes all of Leith's crimes."

Sergeant Ackley picked up the telephone. "Get me Captain Carmichael," he said, and a moment later, he said into the transmitter, "Captain, this is Ackley. I've been thinking about that Alcott case, and checking over the newspaper accounts. I noticed there were different photographs in the papers, and in studying those photographs, my eye hit upon a highly significant detail, one that I think has been overlooked . . . What's that? . . . Yes, Captain . . . No, it's apparent from the photographs . . . Yes, Captain . . Right away."

Sergeant Ackley hung up the telephone, and said to the undercover man, "Well, that's all, Beaver. As I've told you, you get me the facts, and I'll put them together. I'm going up to have a conference with Captain Carmichael."

Beaver said, "You might mention to Captain Carmichael that I furnished the idea."

Sergeant Ackley stared at him with steady hostility. "You furnished the idea!" he said. "Why, you insisted there wasn't any clue. I was the one who kept telling you that it was in those photographs."

"But I did mention the discrepancy between the three strips of adhesive tape in the one picture and the four in the other."

Sergeant Ackley said, "I had noticed that and was debating whether to call your attention to it, Beaver. I pointed out to you that the key clue was contained in those pictures."

"I see. It was all your idea."

Sergeant Ackley folded the papers under his arm. "Of course it was my idea," he said.

The valet entered the penthouse apartment to find Lester Leith, his head heavily bandaged, engaged in conversation with a gray-haired, rather fleshy woman in the middle sixties.

Lester Leith said to the woman, "Here's my valet now, Mrs. Randerman. His name is Scuttle. You'll find him very efficient. I believe he has another name for purposes of social security. What the devil is it? Woodchuck, Scuttle?"

"No, sir," the spy said, his face flushing angrily.

"Weasel," Lester Leith said. "That's it. This is Mrs. Randerman, who's going to act as my assistant in a business venture. You'll carry out her instructions the same as you would my own, Scuttle."

The spy said, "Yes, sir. And the name's Beaver, sir. B-e-a-v-e-r." Leith said, "To be sure, Scuttle. Beaver. Why didn't I think of it?"

The spy said to Mrs. Randerman, "I shall consider it a privilege to serve you, madam," and to Lester Leith: "May I ask, sir, what happened to your head?"

Leith raised delicately exploring fingertips to the bandage around his head. "A bit of a bump, Scuttle," he said, "that's all."

"Should I call a doctor, sir?"

"Oh, dear no, Scuttle. It'll be quite all right. I probably didn't need the bandage, but you remember you'd purchased some bandage and adhesive tape."

"Yes, sir."

"I found that they came in handy," Leith said, and then, with a smile for Mrs. Randerman, "Sort of Alice-in-Wonderland affair. My valet buys the bandage and adhesive tape, and an hour later I bump my head. Do you like soda in your Scotch, Mrs. Randerman?"

Her eyes twinkled. "Lots of it," she said.

Leith nodded to the valet. "Two of them, Scuttle," he said.

The spy mixed the drinks.

"Did you," Leith asked him, "get the diamond rings and the pearl necklace, Scuttle?"

"I ordered them, yes, sir."

Leith yawned. "Well, when they come up, send them back."

The spy almost dropped the bottle he was holding. "Send them back, sir?" he echoed. "You mean that you don't want them?"

"I'd hardly want them if I send them back, would I, Scuttle?"

"No, sir, but they're already paid for. I can't return them."

Leith waved his hand in an airy gesture of dismissal. "In that case, Scuttle, we'll take them, of course. Perhaps the janitor would care for them."

"But I don't understand, sir."

"I'm quite sure you don't, Scuttle," Lester Leith said, "and I think Mrs. Randerman could stand just about one more jigger of that Scotch."

"Yes, sir. I-it wasn't anything I did, sir, was it?"

Leith smiled. "On the contrary, Scuttle, it was something I did. I intended to conduct a psychological experiment, using the bandage, the pearls, the diamonds, and one or two other bits of equipment, but this bump on the head caused me to use up the bandage. So we'll just forget about the experiment."

"But I can get more bandage, sir," the spy said eagerly.

Leith stretched and yawned. "Oh, I don't think it's necessary, Scuttle," he said. "I've been having so much trouble with Sergeant Ackley lately that I'm afraid he might misunderstand my purpose in conducting the experiment. And watch what you're doing with that soda siphon, Scuttle."

The spy, consumed with curiosity, served the drinks and sought to hover around in the vicinity of the living room where Lester Leith and Mrs. Randerman were discussing the theater, Leith listening with interest to the stories which Mrs. Randerman told of her vaudeville days.

But Leith spiked the valet's guns by saying pointedly, "That's all, Scuttle. We'll ring if we want anything," and the spy had no alternative but to withdraw to his quarters from which he immediately telephoned police headquarters, using the unlisted number through which undercover men were able to communicate directly with Sergeant Ackley.

Nor was Sergeant Ackley's voice any too cordial as he said, "Okay, Beaver. What is it?"

The spy said, "He has the woman all right, a Mrs. Randerman, who was on the vaudeville stage at one time. You'd better look her up. But he's countermanded the order on the imitation pearls and diamonds. He seems to have lost interest in the entire affair—and he's used some of the bandage and adhesive tape to place a bandage around his head. He says that he had a bit of a bump."

"Well," Sergeant Ackley growled, "that was one screwy tip you gave me, Beaver. You'd better put a bandage around your own head."

"What do you mean?"

Sergeant Ackley said, "Alcott hadn't hidden any twenty-five thousand dollars in that bandage. That bandage covered a very real automobile accident. I passed that tip of yours on to Captain Carmichael, and he became as excited about it as you were. He dashed down to the man's cell and ripped off the bandage, and then found he had to call a doctor to replace it. He told me to tell you not to jump at conclusions next time."

The spy gripped the receiver. "You told Captain Carmichael it was my idea?"

Sergeant Ackley said tersely, "It was, wasn't it?"

The spy thought for a minute. "Oh," he said, "if you want to put it that way, I suppose it was."

"It isn't the way I want to put it," Sergeant Ackley said. "I'm trying to get the facts, and I don't like your attitude in trying to pass the buck, Beaver. That's the trouble with the whole department—too many people trying to pass the buck."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Now then," Sergeant Ackley barked, "the only chance we stand of breaking this case is to get Lester Leith's brains working on it. Leith will solve the case and grab the money. We'll grab Leith. It's up to you to see that he doesn't lose interest."

"But he's already lost interest," the spy said.

"Well, get his interest back," the sergeant said. "You may not know it, Beaver, but this is one sweet mess. Judge Mandeville thinks the police department was trying to frame him. The Click-Fast Shutter Company is trying to blame us, and Frank Boyen, their president, turns out to be a close friend of the mayor's. You can see where that leaves us."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"I want to catch Lester Leith," Sergeant Ackley said, "but that's a minor matter compared with locating that twenty-five thousand bucks. If Judge Mandeville took it, we want to know it. We want to pin it on him. If he didn't take it, we want to find out who did."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"I told Captain Carmichael that I'd make it a point to devote my personal attention to the problem. You understand what that means."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"As a matter of fact, Beaver, your activities have been unduly prolonged. It's one sweet mess when you can't find out what's going on under your very nose. I want some action! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Get busy then," Sergeant Ackley said, and banged up the telephone.

The big spy eased the receiver into place. He sat in front of the telephone, his indignant eyes staring at the transmitter. Then, after several seconds of silence, he broke into speech, a low, rumbling monologue in which Sergeant Ackley and his maternal ancestors were described with a wealth of detail.

From time to time during the afternoon, Lester Leith rang the bell which summoned the spy. With each summons, the spy noticed that the relationship between Mrs. Randerman and Lester Leith seemed to become more cordial as the level of the amber liquid in the bottle diminished. With the third drink, they had started calling each other by their first names. With the fourth drink, Mrs. Randerman's anecdotes of the stage had become more spicy, and by the time Leith escorted Mrs. Randerman to the elevator, they seemed to be friends of long standing.

The spy, shrewdly judging that Leith's expansive mood and the effect of the Scotch would make it advisable to strike while the iron was hot, busied himself in straightening up the living room, removing glasses and cleaning ashtrays. He hoped that Leith would feel sufficiently talkative to give him an excuse for conversation, and his eyes glistened with satisfaction when he noticed that Leith was quite evidently the victim of what, under other circumstances, would have been described as a "talking jag."

"A very estimable woman, Scuttle," Leith said.

"She is indeed, sir."

"There's nothing like the stage to give a person an interesting background, Scuttle."

"Quite right, sir. I believe you said she was to be a business associate."

Lester Leith shook his head sadly. "It's all off, Scuttle," he said, and his face became so lugubrious that the undercover man, watching him sharply, felt that the man upon whom he spied would, on the slightest provocation, transfer his talking jag into a crying jag—which did not suit the spy's purpose at all.

"I suppose, sir, you're too young to remember vaudeville in its prime."

Leith, his last drink seeming to take cumulative effect, said mournfully, "A milestone in our artistic past, Scuttle, a memory . . . a memory which has become but monument to death of art . . . Shwept

aside by . . . flickering miles of mass entertainment . . . movies, Scuttle . . . radio . . . blah—losha blah!"

"Yes, sir."

"Most sad, Scuttle, a sad contemary . . . a sad con—con—contemporary . . . a sad . . . Scuttle, what the devil am I trying to say?"

"A sad commentary, sir?"

"Thash right, Scuttle. Good ole Scuttle, always there in a pinch. Need anything, and you get it. Sad commentary. That's what I wash trying to say, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir. And why aren't you going to use the diamonds and the pearls?" the spy asked, taking advantage of Lester Leith's condition

to press his advantage.

Leith shook his head mournfully. "Can't do it, Scuttle. Sergeant Ackley's snooping."

"But Sergeant Ackley wouldn't need to know anything about it."

"Good ole Scuttle! Sentiment reflects upon your intelligence, just as—just as your loyalty reflects upon—No, thash not right. Just as your loyalty—Well, anyhow, Scuttle, just as your concern shows your loyalty."

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you've never taken full advantage of that loy-

alty, sir."

"Thash right, Scuttle. Perhaps I haven't."

"I notice, sir, that you always play a lone hand. If you'd take me more into your confidence, I could be of even more service to you."

Leith stared at him owlishly.

"Thash idea, Scuttle," he said, "but you can't get ahead of old Ackley. He's too smart."

The undercover man said fervently, "I'd like to have your permission, sir, to express my opinion of Sergeant Ackley."

"Go right ahead, Scuttle. Go right ahead," Lester Leith said.

The spy went ahead, with a fervor which left no room for doubting his sincerity, and Lester Leith listened with beaming approval.

"Scuttle," he asked, "did you ever drive mules?"

"No, sir."

"Never ran a tractor, Scuttle?"

"No, sir."

Leith shook his head sadly. "Ish a gift, Scuttle. I heard a mule skinner once that was almost as good, and they shay tractor men get a pretty good voca—voca—vocabulary, but they can't improve on yours, Scuttle."

"You agree with me, sir?" the spy asked.

Leith said, "I think you're an excellent judge of character, Scuttle. Know'm lika book, Scuttle."

The spy made bold to move closer. "If you could tell me just what you had in mind, sir, I think perhaps I could arrange it."

Lester Leith said owlishly, "Wanted to find out about that man Betcher, Scuttle... purty big private detective, Scuttle, but you can't tell about 'im. Somethin' fishy about th' whole business."

The spy said eagerly, "Yes sir. I think you're right, sir."

Leith nodded. "Thank you, Scuttle. Good ole Scuttle. Always stickin' up for me."

"And you intended to use Mrs. Randerman, sir?"

"Thash ri', Scuttle. Thash the idea. Intended to use Miz Randerman. Going to plant her in the hotel, near Besher. Goin' to have her flash losh of diamonds and pearls. I was goin' to put on some false whiskers and be 'er husband, Scuttle. Gonna have a fake burglary and hire Besher to protect the shtuff. Maybe Besher's a crook, Scuttle. You can't tell. Nobody c'n tell who's a crook these days, even the crooks can't tell. Maybe we'd otta start a census of crooks, Scuttle. Get 'em all tabulated . . ."

Leith nodded his head drowsily.

The spy, knowing that he had to work fast, said, "You could go right ahead with that plan, sir, and I think we could find some way of outwitting Sergeant Ackley."

Leith considered the matter with the frowning concentration of one who is having trouble getting his eyes in proper focus. "B'lieve you got somethin' there, Scuttle. Tell you what y'do, Scuttle. We'll make a bet. Thash the idea—make a bet. Nobody can critishize a man for makin' a bet with his valet. Even old sourpuss Ackley couldn't do that, could he, Scuttle?"

"No. sir."

"Thash shwell," Leith said. "We'll make a bet, Shcuttle. I'll bet you fifty dollars I can fix up a crime, and Besher would prove he wash a crook. You bet me fifty dollars he wouldn't. Then you'd go to Sergeant Ackley and ask him if there wash any law against makin' a bet to try and prove a guy was a crook. He'd say, 'No,' and you'd say, 'Put it in writing,' and then we'd have it in writin', right there in good ole black'n white, Scuttle. Somethin' he couldn't wiggle out of . . . Scuttle, there must'a been a li'l too much in that last drink. Ssh too mush—makesh my head feel big, makesh bandashe hurt. Take th' bandashe off, Shuttle."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, and set about removing the bandage.

A moment later, he said, "I don't see any bump, sir."

Lester Leith laughed. "There wasn't any bump, Shuttle. Jus' between you and me, I wash gonna use that bandasze to get that twenty-five—get tha' twenty-five . . ."

As Leith's voice trailed away into silence, the spy said, "Just how were you going to use that to get the twenty-five thousand dollars?"

Leith's eyes suddenly glittered with suspicion. "Did I say anything about twenty-five thousand dollars, Shuttle?"

"No, sir."

"Then don't put words in my mouth. Watch that tongue of yours, Shuttle."

"Yes, sir."

The fit of suspicion passed as quickly as it had arrived. "Thash all ri', Shuttle. Good ole Shuttle. Think I'll lie down for a li'l while, Shuttle."

"Yes, sir. And you want me to get that letter from Sergeant Ackley?"

Leith said, "You couldn't do it, Shuttle."

"I think I could, sir."

"Oh, no, you couldn't, Shuttle. He'sh too schmart. Besides he doesn't like us."

"I know he doesn't like us, sir, but I'm rather ingenious. If you'd only have confidence in me and trust me—I'll tell you what we can do. We could let Sergeant Ackley in on the bet, and then we could let him win. We'd give him twenty-five dollars. Don't you see? Make him a party to it. Then he couldn't say anything."

Leith blinked his eyes. "Shuttle," he said, "b'lieve—b'lieve you've got somethin' there." And his head nodded limply forward.

The big undercover man, his face suffused with triumph, picked up Lester Leith in his arms and carried him gently into the bedroom.

Lester Leith stirred, stretched his arms above his head, and then groaned in agony. He reached out a groping hand, found the call bell by his bedside, and rang for his valet.

The big spy popped into the room with suspicious alacrity. "Good morning, sir," he said.

Leith groaned again. "Good Lord, Scuttle, what happened?"

The spy walked across the room to the heavy drapes, drew them aside and let sunlight stream into the room.

"Don't you remember, sir," he said, "Mrs. Randerman was here, and you—you—"

"Yes, yes," Leith said. "We had some drinks. Then what, Scuttle?" The spy said tactfully, "You retired early, sir."

"I must have," Leith said. "Where did I dine, Scuttle, at home or . . ."

"You didn't dine, sir."

"Didn't dine?"

"No, sir."

Leith sat up in bed and twisted his face into a wry grimace. The spy said, "I have iced tomato juice and Worcestershire sauce for you, sir."

The big undercover operative stepped into the kitchenette, returned with a tall glass in which ice cubes were clicking refreshingly. "If I may suggest it, sir," he said, "you'd get the best results by drinking this all at once."

Leith sighed, and gulped down the contents of the glass. He rolled his head wearily from side to side, and said, "Scuttle, was I drunk?"

"You had been drinking, sir. By the way, sir, I have that letter from Sergeant Ackley."

"What letter?" Leith asked.

"The letter we were talking about," the spy said. "Don't you remember?"

Leith frowned. "I have a hazy recollection, a distorted mirage of a memory. Scuttle, did I talk too much?"

"Not at all, sir. You confided in me, I may say, a little more freely than has heretofore been the case, and I trust you'll have no reason to regret your action."

Leith's features showed anxiety and alarm. "Scuttle, what the devil did I say to you?"

"Nothing that you need regret, sir. You mentioned that you wished to set a trap for Charles Betcher."

"Well, disregard it, Scuttle."

"And," the spy went on, "you suggested that you and I might make a bet, that I could get Sergeant Ackley to take a part of the bet and give us his permission to set a trap."

"Scuttle," Leith said sharply, "are you making that up?"

"Indeed I am not."

Leith said, "Scuttle, I can't imagine myself doing anything so utterly asinine."

"I think it's a good idea, sir, particularly since Sergeant Ackley has walked into the trap."

"He has?"

"Yes, sir. After you retired, and I saw that you wouldn't—Well, that you wouldn't be apt to need me any more, I slipped down to police headquarters."

"But I thought you and Sergeant Ackley were at sword's points."

"We are," the spy said, "but the sergeant has made certain accusations reflecting on my integrity in times past, and I used that as an excuse to call on him. I told him frankly that I intended to sue him for defamation of character."

"And what did he say?"

"He apologized, sir. He said that he had been suspicious of both of us, but that he had come to the conclusion he was wrong. He said that if you wanted to resume your amateur crime dabbling, there would be no objection, just so long as you confined yourself to an academic solution and didn't interfere with the police activities."

Leith said, "Scuttle, I never wanted to solve crimes. I only claimed that frequently valuable clues as to the identity of the criminal were contained in newspaper accounts, and that the police failed to appreciate the significance of certain bits of evidence set forth in the newspapers."

"Yes, sir. Well, to make a long story short, I told Ackley about our bet, and he said that he would like to come in for half of it. You might care to read this."

The spy handed Lester Leith a page of scrawled handwriting, and

Leith read it slowly.

"You'll notice the endorsement at the bottom," the spy said, "in Sergeant Ackley's handwriting. He says, 'I think this is a good bet, and I'll come in on a fifty-fifty basis.'"

Leith suddenly jumped out of bed. "Scuttle," he said, "get Mrs. Randerman on the phone. Tell her to be here inside of an hour. Get me those dark glasses. I want a suit of ready-made clothes with my sleeve and leg measurements, but cut for a stout model. I want those pearls and diamonds—the imitations—and I want that white feather, Scuttle."

"The white feather, sir? I gave it to you yesterday. You put it in your wallet."

"That's right, Scuttle. I'd forgotten."

The spy said ingratiatingly, "Perhaps, sir, since you've seen fit to confide in me to such an extent, you'll tell me what you wanted with the white feather."

"It's a pocket piece," Leith said. "I'm going to carry it in my wallet for luck, Scuttle."

"And the suit, sir?"

Leith said, in a burst of confidence, "We'll have Mrs. Randerman register at Betcher's hotel. Betcher's still there, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"And has the same suite that he had when he was working with Frank Boyen to set a trap for Judge Mandeville?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the suite in which Rodney Alcott was given the twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, sir—only he claims it was only twenty-five dollars."

"And as I understand it, Scuttle, Alcott was never out of sight of the detectives after he received that money and until he entered Mandeville's office. Is that right?"

"That's right, sir."

"Do you know how soon they left Betcher's hotel suite after the money was given to Alcott, Scuttle?"

"Right away, sir, although there was just a bit of delay in connection with making certain that the detectograph was properly installed."

"And Alcott was never out of sight of the detectives?"

"No, sir."

Leith said, "Well, Scuttle, we'll have Mrs. Randerman pose as a wealthy woman who wants protection for her jewelry. I'll be her husband. I'll have to disguise myself, of course. I'll use some padding to make me appear heavier and use the false mustache. I think the white walrus mustache will be appropriate."

"Even so, sir, you're a young man, and—"

"I'll make myself up carefully," Leith said, "and I'll let you in on a secret, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir," the spy said.

"My eyes," Leith said, "are going to be very, very weak. I can't stand any strong light. My interviews with Betcher will be in a darkened room, a room so dark that he will barely have a good look at me. That will keep him from being suspicious. It will also keep him from spotting that the gems are imitations."

The spy said, "By George, it does fit in, doesn't it?"

"What, Scuttle?"

"All of those things you wanted."

"Of course they fit in," Leith said.

"I'll get busy right away, sir."

Leith sat down on the edge of the bed. "I wonder," he said, "if I

could get along as a fat man." He stripped off his pajamas, rolled them into a ball, and placed them against his stomach.

"Too lumpy, sir," the spy said.

Leith nodded. He took a pillow from the bed, held it up against his front. "How's that, Scuttle?"

"Better, sir."

Leith said, "Is there more of that adhesive tape in the place, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

Leith said, "We'll tape this pillow to my stomach. No, never mind, Scuttle. I'll hold it in place with my hands. You can take my waist measurement and my chest measurement. Get a tape measure and measure me for that suit."

The spy started for the door of the bedroom with alacrity. "You're never going to regret this, sir," he said.

Leith, still holding the pillow against his middle, said, "I'm quite sure I won't, Scuttle. And don't forget the cane, the crutch, the mustache, and the wig."

Lester Leith, standing in front of the mirror, said, "How do I look, Scuttle?"

The spy surveyed the portly form which seemed so incongruous with the finely-chiseled features of Lester Leith. The walrus mustache and the dark-lensed glasses furnished an added touch of the bizarre. "Very nice, sir, and considering the manner in which we purchased the suit, it fits you very nicely, sir."

Leith nodded. "Now," he said, "if you'll get a taxicab, I'll join Mrs. Randerman in Betcher's hotel, and we'll see just how good a detective he is."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, and moved over to pick up the telephone.

A taxi took Lester Leith to the hotel where Mrs. Randerman had already registered. Leith was escorted by a bellboy to the suite which she had reserved for herself and husband.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready," she said.

Leith took the cane which she handed him, sat down in an easy chair, adjusted his dark glasses and the false mustache. She said, "I think a little greasepaint would put some lines in your face. Permit me."

With the deft skill of one who who has studied the art of makeup, she etched wrinkles in the contours of his face. When she had finished, she stepped back and eyed her work with approval. "Not so bad," she said. "You'll get by in a darkened room."

"Under those circumstances," Leith observed, "let's darken the

room."

She drew the heavy drapes across the windows and switched out the electric lights.

Leith said, "Now, go ahead and call him."

She stepped to the telephone and said, "I'd like to communicate with Charles Betcher, please. This is Mrs. Randerman in 409."

She hung up the telephone and waited. A few minutes later, when the bell shattered the silence, she picked up the receiver and said. "Yes? . . . Oh, Mr. Betcher, this is Mrs. Randerman. I'm in 409 in the hotel. I understood that you were staying here. In fact, that's one of the reasons I picked this hotel. My husband is neurotic. He's going blind. He's crippled with arthritis, and is commencing to get complexes of persecution. Recently he's become obsessed with the idea that someone is going to steal my jewelry. I've tried to assure him that it's all foolishness, but . . . What's that? . . . A doctor? Oh, but you don't understand, Mr. Betcher. I've already seen the doctor. and the doctor suggested that I get in touch with you. The doctor says that we should humor him as much as possible . . . That's very kind of you, Mr. Betcher. We'd be willing to pay a very substantial fee if you would just drop in for a consultation and assure us that you'll put men on the job. You won't need to do it, of course, just promise.

"You see, my husband is in rather a peculiar mental condition. His appearance is somewhat unusual, and whenever anyone turns to look at him, he thinks that it's a gem thief shadowing us to find the best method of getting my jewels. Now, if you could assure him that you were going to protect us, then whenever anyone turned to look at him on the street, I could tell him that it was one of your operatives, a detective who was keeping us under surveillance so that no crook could get near us... That will be very kind of you... Could you come right away, please?... Thank you... I will be most generous."

She hung up the phone and said to Lester Leith, "Okay, he's coming."

Leith said, "All right. Switch on the lights. I'll go in the bedroom. Remember your lines."

She turned to stare at him sharply. "Look here," she said. "This isn't illegal, is it?"

Leith smiled. "Not if you do *exactly* as I tell you," he said, "and don't ask any questions. In that way, the responsibility rests wholly on my shoulders."

She said, "Okay, get in that bedroom."

A few moments later Charles Betcher, a portly, dignified man who had cultivated an air of pompous infallibility, knocked on the door. Mrs. Randerman admitted him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came personally, Mr. Betcher. You don't know what it's going to mean to me. My husband, of course, has heard of your reputation. He thinks that aside from Sherlock Holmes you're the greatest detective who ever lived."

Betcher cleared his throat. "Sherlock Holmes," he said, "lacked many of the qualities of a great detective. However, we'll let it pass, madam. It is a pleasure to me to be of service."

"Come in and sit down," she invited.

Betcher strutted pompously across the room and settled his bulk into the most comfortable chair. His eyes drifted to Mrs. Randerman's fingers. "I see that you believe in wearing your jewelry," he said.

"Oh yes," she replied. Then she laughed and said, "I don't care a thing in the world about the jewelry. It's an ornament. Of course, it's valuable, but I see no reason why a person should ruin her pleasure worrying over her valuables."

"Very commendable," Betcher said.

"I think you understand about my husband," Mrs. Randerman said.

"I am familiar with that type of psychosis. My work as a detective involves a knowledge of medical jurisprudence."

Mrs. Randerman said impulsively, "How interesting it must be—how exciting!"

Betcher nodded, slipped a cigar from his pocket, cut off the end, and crossed his legs.

"How much service," he asked, "do you want?"

"I don't want you to do a thing about the stones," she said, "just allay my husband's nervousness."

Betcher said, "I take it you want to use my name?"

"Yes."

Betcher cleared his throat. "Experience has shown that when crooks learn I am protecting a client, the possibility of theft is greatly decreased. We would, of course, have to take that into consideration in fixing the er—er—remuneration."

"I should expect to," Mrs. Randerman said.

Betcher regarded her in studious contemplation. "What," he asked, "are your gems worth?"

Mrs. Randerman patted her hair with her fingers. The imitation stones glittered into dazzling streaks of blurred light. "Oh," she said airily, "not a great deal—that is, it wouldn't make a great deal of financial difference if we should lose them, but it's what they stand for. They've become an obsession with Mr. Randerman."

Betcher said, "Are there just your rings?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I have quite a few other jewels. For instance, there's this."

She reached into the table drawer, took out a jewel case, and from it held up a long rope of pearls.

Betcher showed that he was properly impressed. He started forward to inspect the jewels.

Mrs. Randerman coughed.

From the bedroom of the suite came the sound of a crutch and cane, pounding on the floor, and a petulant cry of, "Irene. Irene. Where the devil are you, Irene?"

"Oh," she said, "that's my husband. He's just awakened. You'll pardon me if I draw all the drapes and switch out the light. He's just recovering from a very severe eye ailment, and can't stand any light whatever. Just a minute, Lester. I'm coming."

Mrs. Randerman fairly flew around the room, drawing the drapes, pulling the curtains, switching off the lights, until the afternoon sunlight, filtering through the drapes, became only a vague twilight which showed the outlines of objects in the room, but gave no opportunity for an inspection in detail.

Betcher, who had moved over toward the jewel case, thought better of it and returned to his chair. Irene Randerman moved quickly to the door of the bedroom.

"Where are you, Irene?" Lester Leith demanded in a high, cracked voice. "Who the devil are you talking with? I hate salesmen. You know that. Tell him we don't want any."

Mrs. Randerman's voice was soothing. "It isn't a salesman, dear. It's a detective who's going to protect our property—the best detective in the business."

Lester Leith said, "To the devil with all detectives. They're crooks. There isn't any one of them that's worth a button outside of Charles Betcher. Charles Betcher and Sherlock Holmes were the two greatest detectives who ever lived."

"Hush, dear," Mrs. Randerman said, in a low voice. "It's Betcher himself."

Lester Leith's voice registered a respect which was akin to reverence. "Betcher himself!" he said in a half-whisper.

"Yes."

"Let me meet him. Let me shake hands with him," Leith said, and the sound of his cane and crutch on the floor beat a tattoo of sound as he came hobbling through the doorway into the darkened room. "Where are you, Betcher?" he called. "Where are you? I want to shake you by the hand."

"Here I am," Betcher said, smiling affably and arising to stand by his chair.

Leith groped his way toward the sound of the voice. Mrs. Randerman, placing the tips of her fingers on his shoulders, guided him through the darkened room.

Betcher had a vague glimpse of a man bent with age and with arthritis, of a drawn, haggard face, a body which had far too much bloated weight around the waistline, a drooping, gray, walrus mustache, a shock of gray hair, and eyes that were completely concealed behind opaque lenses.

"Where are you?" Leith asked. "I can't see clearly—those confounded eyes of mine. Want to shake hands with the greatest detective since Sherlock Holmes."

Mrs. Randerman said warningly, "Not too hard, please. The bones in his hands are affected."

Betcher placed his hand in Lester Leith's, squeezed the fingers gently. "Glad to meet you," he said.

Mrs. Randerman guided Leith's bent figure over to a comfortable chair, eased him down into the cushions, and said, "Now sit there, dear, and don't try to move. You know it hurts you when you move."

Leith said, "What's Betcher want to see us about?"

She said, "I sent for him. I want to hire him to protect my jewelry." "Protect your jewelry—what for?"

"So it won't be stolen, silly, and so you won't worry about it."

"I don't give a hoot about the jewels," Lester Leith said. "I worry about thieves. I don't want thieves snooping around here. My eyes are bad. I can't see people. Living in the dark that way, you don't want to think you're in a room where a thief may sneak up behind you."

Betcher said, "I have undertaken the job of safeguarding your jewels, and I doubt if you will be troubled by any thieves."

"That's fine," Leith admitted. "How much do you want?"

Betcher said, "The service is rather unusual. I wouldn't know just how to go about fixing a price. It would depend somewhat on . . ."

"How much?" Lester Leith interrupted in his cracked, shrill voice. "Taking into consideration the value of the jewelry and . . ."

"How much?"

"A thousand dollars!" Betcher snapped. "Cash on the nail."

Leith, still keeping his high, cracked voice, said, "That's the way I like to have a man talk. No beating around the bush. Straight out. Businesslike. We'll talk it over. We'll let you know in half an hour."

Betcher said, with dignity, "I am not at all anxious to undertake the employment. I have all the work I can do. You'll remember that the suggestion I handle this matter came from you, Mrs. Randerman."

Leith said, "Don't be a pantywaist, Betcher. You're in business for money. A thousand dollars is a lot of money. I don't care how much business you have. If you had a thousand dollars extra, it would be nice gravy."

Betcher said to Mrs. Randerman, "There will be details to discuss in the event you decide to meet my terms."

"You bet there will," Leith said. "When we pay a thousand dollars, we're going to know what we're getting."

"Now, dear," Mrs. Randerman said. "Don't get nervous about it. Mr. Betcher is quite right." Leith said, "He's a good detective. Best detective since Sherlock Holmes. That doesn't mean that *I'm* a fool. He's too inclined to beat around the bush. He'll have to get over that if he's going to do business with us."

Betcher seemed glad of the opportunity to beat a retreat. "When," he asked Mrs. Randerman, "will you let me know?"

"Sometime within half an hour?"

Betcher nodded. "That will be satisfactory."

"You'll be in your room?" she inquired in a low voice.

"Yes," he said.

Leith pounded on the floor with his crutch. "Don't go to him," he said. "Make him come to us. What's getting into you, Irene? You're doing the buying. You—"

"I think you had better go now," Mrs. Randerman said in a low, confidential voice to the detective.

Betcher nodded and slipped quietly out into the corridor.

"How did I do?" Mrs. Randerman asked Lester Leith when the door closed.

"Fine," Leith said.

Charles Betcher returned to his suite to find a telephone call from Frank Boyen, President of the Click-Fast Shutter Company.

The conversation which took place over the telephone was not particularly conducive to peace of mind on the part of the detective. Frank Boyen, approached by a man who claimed to have the ear of Judge Mandeville, and who was asking twenty-five thousand dollars for a favorable verdict in the patent litigation, had approached Betcher for advice. Betcher had suggested setting a trap. In the event Mandeville took the money, Boyen, having proof of the bribery, would be in a position to write his own ticket. In the event it was a swindle, Alcott could be placed behind bars.

The net result of Betcher's activities had been to cost the Click-Fast Shutter Company twenty-five thousand dollars which had disappeared into thin air, to antagonize Judge Mandeville, and to make the management of the corporation the laughing-stock of its competitors and the focal point of a white-hot indignation on the part of its stockholders.

Betcher terminated the conversation as quickly as possible. He assured Boyen that he was "working on the case" and "making progress," that he expected a "satisfactory termination within a very short time—possibly a matter of hours."

He hung up the telephone and mopped his forehead. The afternoon was not particularly auspicious for Charles Betcher.

He was just about to pour himself a good stiff drink when the telephone rang again. He answered it, and heard Mrs. Randerman's voice on the line. She said, "My husband has insisted on seeing you privately. I'm going to bring him down the corridor as far as the door. Draw the curtains and make the room as dark as possible."

"But, my dear Mrs. Randerman," Betcher said, "I have nothing whatever to discuss with your husband."

"He's coming down," she said, "bringing you a check. Goodbye."

Betcher considered that last remark. A check for one thousand dollars involving no outlay of time or energy on his part was well worthwhile. If Mrs. Randerman wanted to pay him a thousand dollars merely to ease the strain on her husband's nerves, it was quite all right with Charles Betcher.

He moved swiftly about the room, pulling drapes into position, lowering shades, switching out lights, making the room as dark as possible.

He heard the hobbledy-bang, hobbledy-bang of Leith's crutch and cane in the corridor, and then there was a tap on the door.

Betcher put on his most affable smile. He opened the door, bowed suavely to Mrs. Randerman, and stood deferentially to one side as she piloted the bent figure into the room.

Mrs. Randerman said, "We've decided to accept your prop-"

"Not so fast! Not so fast!" Leith stormed in his high-pitched, cracked voice. "There are some questions I want to ask first."

Mrs. Randerman said, "Can't you understand, dear? Mr. Betcher is a busy man. All you need to do is give him the check, and he'll give us the protection. You won't be bothered any more seeing thieves who shadow us. Instead you'll see Mr. Betcher's operatives who will be constantly on the job. Won't they, Mr. Betcher?"

She closed her eye in a quick wink, and Charles Betcher said with dignity, "When I undertake a job, I do it to the best of my ability. I have a wide, far-flung organization, Mr. Randerman. I—"

"No need to go into that," Leith said. "If you weren't the best detective since Sherlock Holmes, we wouldn't consider employing you."

Betcher said, with dignity, "Sherlock Holmes was a fictional character, Mr. Randerman. While his creator kindly allowed him to bring his fictional cases to a satisfactory solution, Sherlock Holmes would never have been able to handle the problems which confront me—almost as a matter of daily routine."

Leith chuckled, and the chuckle was sardonic. "Bet he wouldn't have got taken in on that Click-Fast Shutter deal," he said.

Betcher gave an exclamation of annoyance.

Mrs. Randerman said, "Now, now, dear. Just hand him the check and—"

Leith said to her, "What are you doing here? I thought you'd gone back."

"No, dear. I'm waiting to take you back."

Leith pounded with his crutch. "Didn't you leave the door of the room open and unlocked?"

Mrs. Randerman gave a gasp of dismay. "My heavens!" she said. She jumped to her feet and raced down the corridor.

Leith turned his head in the general direction of Charles Betcher. "Where are you?" he asked. "I can't see you."

"Here," Betcher said.

Leith said, "I wanted to get rid of her. I have a business proposition to make."

"What is it?"

Leith said, "She controls the purse strings. She won't let me have money for whiskey—claims drinking isn't good for me. I have to chisel a little bit. I'm not a fool. I know that she's giving you this dough, and that it's all gravy for you. You won't do anything except put a little glass sign on the door stating that the premises are protected by the Charles Betcher Detective Agency, Inc. Now then, how about a kickback?"

"Why, what do you mean?" Betcher asked.

"You know what I mean," Leith said. "Here's a check for a thousand dollars, signed by the wife. It's payable to you. I give it to you. It's gravy. You slip me five hundred bucks on the q.t. Everybody's satisfied."

Betcher said indignantly, "I'll be a party to no such contemptible proceedings."

"Well," Leith said, "we might make a different division. I'll be fair. You give me two hundred and fifty, and you keep seven fifty."

Betcher said, "Mr. Randerman, I am going to repeat this conversation to your wife."

"No, you aren't," Leith cackled, in his high, shrill voice. "I'll call you a liar. She wouldn't believe it."

Betcher said, "If she has given you a check for me, Mr. Randerman, pass it over. I'll give you a receipt and take over the responsibility of your jewels. You can—"

He was interrupted by the sound of running steps in the corridor. Mrs. Randerman flung herself against the door, beating on the panels with her fists. "Quick! Come quick!" she cried. "We've been robbed."

Betcher crossed the room in four swift strides, jerked open the door.

"Come quick!" Mrs. Randerman said. "They must have gone in through the door. They can't have got far. Oh, my jewels! Come!"

She turned and ran back down the corridor. For a moment Betcher hesitated then started to run after her.

Leith called out in his high, shrill voice, "Don't be a fool-"

The banging of the door cut off the rest of the sentence.

Betcher followed Mrs. Randerman down to her suite. The door was still ajar.

"Where were the gems?" he asked.

"Right here in this jewel box."

"In the table drawer?"

"Yes."

"Did you leave the door open and unlocked?"

"I'm afraid I did."

"Who else knew that you kept them there?"

"No one," she said, "except my husband—and perhaps the maid."

Betcher said, "We'll check up on the maid right away."

He stepped to the telephone and asked the operator to connect him with the manager's office. Then he said, in a gravely professional tone, "This is Betcher, the detective. One of my clients has suffered a loss here in the hotel. I'm very anxious to handle the matter quickly, efficiently, and without undue publicity so far as the hotel is concerned. Find the maid and the housekeeper who have this room on their list, and bring them to 409 at once. Don't bring the house detective in on it. I don't like house detectives. I can't work with them."

He hung up and turned to Mrs. Randerman.

"Now, then," he said, "we want to keep that jewel box in a safe place. It probably contains fingerprints. I'll have one of my fingerprint experts check them. Then we'll get the fingerprints of the maid and the housekeeper, and— What's this? It must be your husband."

Mrs. Randerman said, "Oh, the poor man. The light will hurt his eves."

She rushed to the light switch, clicked off the lights, and said to the detective, "Pull down the curtain and draw the drapes. I'll guide him in here."

She ran down the corridor, and a moment later Leith stood in the doorway.

He hobbled into the room, muttering in an angry undertone. He walked across to the jewel case, shifted his cane from his left hand to his right hand, and fished in the side pocket of his coat. Abruptly he brought out a long string of pearls which he dropped into the jewel case.

"There they are," he said.

Mrs. Randerman stared at him, speechless with surprise.

Betcher said, "What the devil's the meaning of this?"

Leith raised his voice until it was a shrill scream of cackling accusation. "It means that you're a fool," he said. "You're a poor excuse for a detective. I wouldn't employ you to guard anything. I took those pearls with me because I wanted you to look them over. Personally, I don't think they're genuine. I wasn't going to pay a thousand dollars to protect a lot of phony jewelry. My own idea is,

my wife has pawned the originals and has taken advantage of my poor eyesight to substitute imitations. I won't stand for it. I kept yelling at you that I had the necklace, but you wouldn't listen. You were in too much of a hurry to go banging down the corridor. Now I suppose you've accused the maid and the chambermaid and will get me in a damage suit."

Lester Leith whipped a tinted oblong of paper from his pocket and tore it into fragments. "Bosh," he said, "I wouldn't give you a thousand cents let alone a thousand dollars. You're fired!"

Betcher drew himself up with dignity. "Permit me to observe," he said, "that I wouldn't work for clients whose mentality seems to be so eccentric, whose chiseling tactics are worse than those of the cheapest crook, and whose personality is distasteful to me. In short, Mr. Randerman, I have the honor to wish you a very good afternoon, and to congratulate myself upon having escaped the burden of having you as a client."

Mrs. Randerman said, "Dear, you've hurt his feelings."

"Hurt his feelings!" Lester Leith cackled. "I suppose now I'll have to give fifty dollars apiece to the maid and housekeeper to square the beef with them. No wonder he cost the Click-Fast Shutter Company twenty-five thousand bucks! Greatest detective since Sherlock Holmes—Bah!"

The doorman at Lester Leith's apartment house stared as Mrs. Randerman, alighting from a taxicab, turned to assist a bent figure attired in a white wig, a drooping walrus mustache and a bulging suit of ready-made clothes. The old man's eyes were shielded from the light by very big dark glasses, the lenses larger than silver dollars, bordered with thick rims of white celluloid.

The two police detectives who had been shadowing the taxicab parked their car some twenty feet behind, and one of them, moving with crisp, businesslike efficiency, jumped to the curb and so timed his movements that he rode up in the same elevator which whisked Lester Leith to the floor of his penthouse apartment.

Mrs. Randerman fitted the latchkey which Leith handed her and then turned to confront the detective standing behind her. "What do you want?" she asked, her voice sharp with suspicion.

The detective said sharply, "Building inspector. A couple of fuses have blown in this apartment, and I think the wiring's defective."

"Well, I don't," Mrs. Randerman said. "I don't think the owner of the apartment would care to be disturbed at this time."

"I'm coming in anyway," the detective said, pushing forward past Mrs. Randerman as the bent, white-haired figure opened the door.

Beaver, the undercover man, was waiting in the reception hallway. He flashed a quick warning wink to the detective who was posing as a building inspector.

Mrs. Randerman said to Leith, "This man insists on inspecting the wiring, Mr. Leith. I told him I didn't think—"

"It's all right," Leith said dejectedly. He straightened his bent figure, dropped the crutch, threw the cane from him petulantly, ripped off the wig, dropped it to the floor, jerked off the smoked glasses and the walrus mustache. "Well, Scuttle," he said, "I was wrong."

"Wrong, sir?"

"Yes. It's once I made a mistake. The man's honest—hopelessly, stupidly honest."

Leith raised his vest, loosened his belt, pulled out a pillow, and tossed it to the spy. "Put this back in my bedroom," he said. "Lay out a gray suit, give these clothes to the Salvation Army. You may as well keep the imitation jewels, Mrs. Randerman. They might come in handy."

The spy said, "Yes, sir." He stooped to pick up the wig and the dark glasses, and said to the police detective, pointedly, "I think you'd better come back at another time, if you don't mind. I can handle everything now—that is, if there's anything wrong with the wiring."

Lester Leith, the loose folds of the ready-made suit bagging about his well-knit figure, said, "Oh, let him inspect, Scuttle. Mrs. Randerman and I want a Scotch and soda."

Leith walked into the living room, held a chair for Mrs. Randerman, then dropped dejectedly into his favorite reclining chair.

The police detective and the undercover man held a hurried, whispered conversation. Then the detective eased himself through the door, to report to Sergeant Ackley that Leith had been shadowed to the very door of his apartment.

Beaver took the pillow and articles of disguise into the bedroom, secured ice cubes from the refrigerator, wheeled the portable bar into the living room, and regarded Leith's lugubrious countenance with shrewd, glittering eyes.

Leith said, "Use the tallest glasses you have, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir. Your trip a failure, sir?"

Leith said, "Yes. My deductions were absolutely wrong, Scuttle.

I felt certain that Betcher had switched the bills just as he handed them to Alcott."

"Now you've changed your mind?" the spy asked.

"Definitely, Scuttle. I set a trap for Betcher. If he'd been inclined to chisel, he'd have given me a kickback on Mrs. Randerman's check. He didn't do it. The man's honest, I tell you. Stupid, opinionated, conceited, overrated, egotistical—but honest, blast him!"

"Yes, sir," the spy said. "Of course that's only one possibility, sir."

Leith said testily, "Well, we won't discuss it now, Scuttle. Get those drinks ready."

Leith opened his wallet and took out a sheaf of fifty-dollar bills. He passed them over to Mrs. Randerman. "Here you are," he said, "one thousand dollars in fifties."

She said, "Really, Mr. Leith, I feel guilty taking this money. It's a gross overpayment, particularly since you—"

"That's all right," Leith said, leaning across to drop the money into her lap. "The money means very little to me. I'm chagrined to think that I was so wrong. Well, I'll drink your health, Mrs. Randerman, and then you can be on your way, and Beaver will help me

get rid of this abominable suit."

Fifteen minutes later, when Mrs. Randerman had left, Leith again took his wallet from his pocket. "Well, Beaver," he said, "I owe you fifty dollars."

The spy said, virtuously, "Oh, now, sir, that bet was just for the purpose of trapping Sergeant Ackley. You can give me the twenty-five dollars which is his share of the bet and—"

"No, no, Scuttle. It was a bet, and when I lose a bet I pay off."

He handed the spy fifty dollars, and as he took the fifty-dollar bill from his wallet, a limp, bedraggled white feather fell out into his hand.

Leith looked at it and laughed sardonically.

The spy said, "That feather doesn't seem to have brought you any luck, sir."

"It hasn't," Leith said.

"May I ask why you wanted it?" the spy inquired.

Leith said, dejectedly, "Oh, that was just a second string to my bow, Scuttle."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

Leith's voice was flat with disinterest. "You see, Scuttle," he explained patiently, "there were three possibilities. Either Betcher was crooked, Alcott was crooked, or Judge Mandeville actually took

the bribe. Because of the crude manner in which the thing was handled, I was very much inclined to give Mandeville a clean bill of health. If he'd wanted a bribe, he'd have gone about it in a more skillful manner. After all, you know, he has a trained legal mind. I picked Betcher as being the more likely suspect. I was wrong. The feather proves it. If I'd only taken the trouble to look at this feather early this afternoon, I'd have saved myself a lot of work and a humiliating experience."

The spy stared at the feather. "I don't see how you reach that conclusion, sir."

Leith said wearily, "It's simple, Scuttle. The feather which Alcott was holding up in that newspaper photograph was nice and fluffy. This feather has been pressed together, is worn and bedraggled. Yet it's been in my wallet less than twenty-four hours. Alcott claimed he'd been carrying that feather for more than a year. I carry my wallet in my hip pocket, but even if Alcott had his wallet in his breast pocket, within a week at the most that feather would have been pressed flat, the edges would have been worn, and it would have had this same bedraggled appearance."

The spy's eyes glittered with sudden understanding. "Perhaps," he said, "they're both crooked."

Leith shook his head sadly. "No, Scuttle. Betcher's on the square. He's too stupid to be otherwise. Good heavens, Scuttle, I gave him a dozen chances to pick flaws in my story. Among other things, I pretended that I couldn't see, and yet I called Mrs. Randerman's attention to the fact that she'd left the bedroom door open. I complained about having people stare at me on the street, and yet I said I couldn't stand bright light in my eyes . . . No, Scuttle, Betcher is a stuffed shirt, vastly overrated, a pompous, stupid individual who has achieved some measure of success, not because of his own ability, but because of the ability of men whom he has employed. He tried to handle this bribe business personally and Alcott could have swindled him right under his eyes."

The spy's hand quivered with excitement as he took the white feather.

"But," he said, "knowing that Alcott is the real crook and with this feather as a clue, you could—"

"No, Scuttle," Leith said, "I'm finished. I made a fool of myself. I'm getting as dumb as Sergeant Ackley. Come on, Scuttle, let's get this suit off and you can bundle it up and send it to the Salvation Army . . . Am I dining out tonight, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Van Peltman, sir. At eight. You promised to-"

"Ring her up," Leith said, "and tell her I'm indisposed. Convey my regrets."

"Yes, sir," the spy said. "But this white feather—"

"Don't mention it to me again," Leith said irritably. "I don't want to hear anything more about the case, Scuttle. I'll go in and get these clothes off and get into a shower. You'd better put through that telephone call about the dinner before you forget it."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, and vanished with alacrity into the booth. But the first call which he put through was not to Mrs. Van Peltman, nor was it to Sergeant Ackley. It was a call put through

directly to Captain Carmichael.

When the spy had Carmichael on the phone, he said, "I beg your pardon for calling you direct, Captain, but this is Beaver, the undercover operative working under Ackley."

"Oh yes, Beaver," Captain Carmichael said. "What do you want?" "I'm sorry, Captain, but I understood that you'd been advised I had a wrong idea on that Alcott case."

Carmichael said, "I was placed in rather an embarrassing position, Beaver. That bandage business—"

The spy made so bold as to interrupt. "Pardon me, Captain," he said, "but I think sometimes Sergeant Ackley gets things confused. I thought I'd call you direct so as to eliminate the possibility of any misunderstanding. What I was telling Sergeant Ackley was that I thought the feather Alcott was holding in that newspaper picture was a most significant clue."

Captain Carmichael said, "The feather, Beaver?"

"Yes, Captain."

"What the devil kind of a clue would that be? What does it sig-

nify?" Carmichael asked.

"Don't you see, Captain?" Beaver said. "Alcott says that feather is a pocket piece, one that he's carried in his wallet for some time. As a matter of fact, the newspaper photograph itself proves that he's a liar. That feather is all fluffy and in perfect condition. You'll find that if you carry one of those light, downy feathers in your wallet for no longer than twenty-four hours, it will commence to look rough and frayed and—"

"By George," Captain Carmichael interrupted, "you have some-

thing there, Beaver!"

"I thought so," the spy said modestly. "I tried to explain it to Sergeant Ackley, but the sergeant occasionally jumps at conclusions.

I think he had some idea about that bandaged head, and he naturally thought that anything I was trying to tell him had something to do with that."

Captain Carmichael said, "I'm glad you called me direct, Beaver. You did quite right. That's a most valuable clue. I should have had my wits about me. It's obvious that feather couldn't have been carried in the man's wallet for any length of time. That's very good work, Beaver, very good reasoning."

The spy grinned as he eased the telephone receiver back into its cradle.

Down in an isolated cell at the city jail two husky detectives peeled off their coats, neatly folded them, and placed them over the back of the chair. They took off their shirts and ties.

Rodney Alcott, seated at the far end of the cell, watched them with apprehensive eyes. "What are they going to do?" he asked Captain Carmichael.

Captain Carmichael said grimly, "How about that feather?"

"What about it?"

Carmichael said, "You claim you had been carrying that for more than a year as a lucky piece."

"That's right," Alcott said.

Captain Carmichael laughed sardonically. "When you carry a feather in a wallet for even twenty-four hours, it looks all bedraggled. The feather you had looked as though it had just been plucked out of a goose. All right, boys, get started."

Captain Carmichael turned toward the cell door.

One of the big plainclothes men spat suggestively on his hands, and approached Alcott, his eyes glittering in anticipation.

Alcott screamed, "Don't go, Captain! Don't go! I'll come clean!"

Captain Carmichael turned. "Well," he said, "it's about time. Why didn't you say so sooner?"

"Because I thought I could get away with it," Alcott sobbed, "but now that you're wise to that feather, I'll tell you all about it . . ."

Lester Leith, enjoying the luxury of a lazy evening at home, looked up from the magazine he was reading as the buzzer sounded an imperative signal. "Better see who it is, Scuttle," he said.

The spy opened the door. Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by Captain Carmichael and two detectives, pushed their way through the door.

Carmichael said, "All right, Sergeant. You do the talking."

Sergeant Ackley pounded his way across the room.

Lester Leith arched his eyebrows in mild surprise. "Why, good evening, gentlemen," he said. "What brings you here, and why the officious manner, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Ackley said, "You know very well what I'm after, Leith." Leith shook his head. "I'm not much of a mind-reader, Sergeant," he said.

Ackley said, "We've been working on Rodney Alcott. He broke down and confessed the whole deal."

"Indeed," Leith said. "What did he say?"

"He's a chiseler and an opportunist," Sergeant Ackley said. "He thought there was an opportunity to shake down Frank Boyen for twenty-five thousand dollars. By capitalizing on a family connection Alcott had been able to be seen in public once or twice with Judge Mandeville. He took occasion to see that Frank Boyen, the president of the Click-Fast Shutter Company, knew of his contact with Judge Mandeville. Then he approached Boyen and tried to get twenty-five thousand dollars which he supposedly was going to pass on to Judge Mandeville.

"Boyen smelled a rat and called in Betcher, the private detective. Betcher also smelled a rat. They intended to give Alcott the money and find out what he did with it. If he went south with it, they were going to arrest him. If he passed it over to Judge Mandeville, they were going to arrest both of them."

Leith said, "I have read the papers, Sergeant, and am familiar with the superficial facts. Do I understand that you have called on me this evening to ask me to collaborate with you?"

Sergeant Ackley gave an impatient exclamation. "You know why I've called," he said. "You doped it all out."

"Doped what all out?"

"What happened," Sergeant Ackley said.

"Indeed, no," Leith observed. "I'd be interested to know what did happen."

"As though you didn't know," Ackley said. "I tell you Alcott has confessed. They took him into Betcher's suite in the hotel. He was given the twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills there, and he knew, of course, they'd keep him under surveillance until he had gone to Judge Mandeville's chambers. But Alcott's pretty slick. He managed to get one of the pieces of adhesive tape off of the bandage on his head. He was sitting on the bed in Betcher's suite at the time. He got his knife out of his pocket. While they were checking and listing

the numbers on the bills, he pushed back the end of the pillowcase and cut a small slit in the end of the pillow. When they handed him the twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills, he took them with his right hand, folded them, and then surreptitiously slipped them into his left hand. He had already planted twenty-five one-dollar bills in his left coat sleeve. He managed to substitute those bills and then put them ostentatiously in his pocket. He shoved the twenty-five one-thousand-dollar bills into the opening in the pillow, put the piece of adhesive tape over the cut in the pillow, and pulled back the pillowslip. He intended to watch his opportunity, return, and pick up the twenty-five thousand dollars.

"The thing that betrayed him was a white feather from the inside of the pillow. In pulling the adhesive tape from his bandage, he got some of the adhesive stuck to his fingers. That caused one of the white feathers from the inside of the pillow to stick to his fingers and get folded in with the one-dollar bills. Later on, when the one-dollar bills were found in his wallet, the white feather was among them. He knew that he had to think fast and explain away that feather. Otherwise, it would furnish a clue to the entire business. So he handed out a cock-and-bull story about it being a lucky piece that he had carried for some time."

Leith's eyes showed interest.

"That's very interesting, Sergeant," he said. "Now, would you mind telling me how it concerns me?"

"You know how it concerns you. You went to a lot of trouble to set the stage for a nice little act which you staged in Betcher's apartment this afternoon. You went up there with a pillow under your clothes. You arranged things so that you had a few minutes alone in Betcher's room. Those few minutes were sufficient for you to identify the pillow that had the twenty-five thousand dollars in it. You couldn't take the time there to search around in the feathers and find the roll of bills, so you simply switched pillows! You took the one which you had used as padding and placed it on Betcher's bed, took the one on Betcher's bed which was sealed up with a piece of adhesive tape and put it inside of your clothes as padding, and then went down the hall to terminate your 'employment' of Betcher. You did the whole thing so elaborately no one suspected that your real purpose was to have a few minutes alone in Betcher's room in the hotel."

Lester Leith nodded. "Sergeant," he said, "I admire much of your deductive reasoning. As it happens, this time you're a lot closer to

the true facts of the case than is ordinarily the case. To be frank with you, Sergeant, I noticed the discrepancy between the condition of that feather and Alcott's story as soon as I saw his picture in the paper. Then when I saw the picture taken after he was booked and noticed that one of the strips of adhesive tape was missing, I thought that it was quite possible that he had concealed the money in a pillow somewhere, and that the white feather had stuck to his fingers when he pulled it out.

"However, Sergeant, my interest in crime is only academic. It's that of a student. The practical application of my theories to a so-

lution of the crime has no particular charm for me.

"However, it did occur to me that Betcher might perhaps be a crook, and I suggested the matter to Scuttle, my valet. He thought that Betcher was quite honest. The thing got to a point where we laid a wager on it, and I believe that you—"

"That's enough," Sergeant Ackley interrupted. "We're not interested in anything about that. We have a search warrant. We're going to search your apartment, and if we find a pillow with adhesive

tape on it-"

"Just a moment, Sergeant," Captain Carmichael said. "I think Mr. Leith's comments constitute damaging admissions. I think we should hear him out. Do you admit, Mr. Leith, that you posed as Mr. Randerman, and that you and Mrs. Randerman went to all that elaborate buildup for the purpose of making contact with Betcher?"

"Certainly," Leith said.

Captain Carmichael frowned. "I'm afraid," he said, "you're going to have some difficulty explaining that."

"Oh, not at all," Leith said. "It's simply the result of a wager. Sergeant Ackley knows all about it. In fact, he's a party to the wager."

Sergeant Ackley said, "I can explain it all, Captain. But this isn't the time."

"In fact," Leith said, "I have already paid the wager to my valet, and I have reason to believe that he's passed Sergeant Ackley's share on to him."

Captain Carmichael frowned. "Is that true, Sergeant?" he asked. "Well," Sergeant Ackley said, "it was a private matter, and—"

"Private matter!" Captain Carmichael roared. "It would make the department the laughing-stock of the newspapers, and why the devil didn't you report it?"

"I didn't think it was—"

"I know why you didn't report it," Captain Carmichael said. "You wanted to chisel twenty-five dollars."

"At the time," Sergeant Ackley said, "I thought it was best. I-"

"I notice there was nothing about that wager mentioned in your reports...Get busy, men. You have a search warrant. Look through these pillows and see if you can find one which has been cut, and the cut repaired with adhesive tape."

Lester Leith said, in a slow drawl, "Of course, Captain, you know this is an inexcusable outrage. I should resent it, only I'm rather tired tonight, and being resentful consumes a lot of energy, don't you think?"

Captain Carmichael said nothing.

Sergeant Ackley, who had popped into the bedroom, let out a whoop of delight. He returned to the living room, holding up a pillow in one end of which a small cut had been patched up with a piece of adhesive tape. "This is it!" he shouted. "This will convict him. This is all the evidence we need."

Leith said, "That's nonsense, Sergeant. I told you that white feather had caused me to wonder about Alcott. In the privacy of my own apartment I made an experiment to determine whether a small hole in a pillow could be plugged with adhesive tape taken from a bandage. I found that it could."

Sergeant Ackley said gloatingly, "You'll have a chance to tell that to the jury. This is the same pillow which was taken from Betcher's hotel. I can swear to it. I've seen the pillows. I can identify them. Now then, you supercilious crook, laugh *that* off."

One of the detectives who had entered Beaver's bedroom came running into the living room, carrying a pillow. "I've found it, Captain," he said.

There was grim silence while the detective peeled back the pillowcase to show a second pillow with a cut covered with adhesive tape.

"Any other pillows?" Captain Carmichael asked dryly.

The detective said, "Gosh, Captain, I didn't look. I found this one. It was the first one I looked at, and—"

"Look at the others," Captain Carmichael said.

The crestfallen Sergeant Ackley and the other detectives returned to their search. In the next five minutes they uncovered six pillows. Each one had been cut, and the cut patched with adhesive tape.

Lester Leith, who had been calmly smoking during the search, picked up his magazine and started to read.

Captain Carmichael, fighting back a twinkle which persisted in creeping into his frosty eyes, said, "What's your explanation of these pillows, Leith?"

Leith looked up from the magazine. "Those?" he said. "Oh, just a psychological experiment, Captain. You know, I'm one of these confounded amateurs who likes to read about crime in the newspapers, and then try to work out some purely academic solution." Captain Carmichael said, "I'm afraid, Leith, that there's enough

Captain Carmichael said, "I'm afraid, Leith, that there's enough evidence against you this time to arrest you, even if the evidence isn't strong enough to convict."

Leith said, "Oh, I don't think so, Captain. If I were arrested, it seems to me the police would be placed in rather a peculiar position. In the first place, they'd have to admit that I, a rank outsider and an amateur, uncovered a theory which solved the Mandeville bribe case simply by looking at a perfectly obvious clue contained in a newspaper illustration, a clue which the police had in their fingers, a clue which was staring them right in the face. Furthermore, as a part of my defense, it would appear that I did what I did at the instigation of Sergeant Ackley, who made a surreptitious profit of twenty-five dollars on the transaction, and who, in order to get that twenty-five dollars, assured me *in writing* that it would be no crime to proceed with my plans."

Lester Leith paused and shook his head sadly. "You couldn't convict me," he said, "and it would put the police force in a most unpleasant light. In short, Captain, they'd appear positively ludicrous."

Captain Carmichael's eyes lost their twinkle as they fastened themselves on Sergeant Ackley. "The man's right, Sergeant," he said, "and you have yourself to thank for it."

"But these pillows!"

"Which pillow is the one that came from Betcher's hotel?" the Captain asked.

"Well, of course," Sergeant Ackley said, looking at the pillows on the floor, "they've been pretty well mixed up now, and I—"

"Oh, but you identified one of them as having been the pillow," Lester Leith said. "You were willing to swear to it, Sergeant. Come, come, Sergeant. Can't you pick out the right pillow now?"

Sergeant Ackley's facial expression showed only too plainly what was going on in his mind.

Captain Carmichael turned toward the door. "Come, Sergeant," he said. "You're not doing yourself or the Department any good by remaining here. If you ever had a case against Leith, it certainly

has been botched up so that the less publicity that's given it the better."

As Captain Carmichael started to close the door, he turned to Lester Leith. "I wish we had your mind on the force," he said. "It might increase our efficiency so far as catching criminals is concerned."

Leith said very courteously, "Thank you, Captain, but it has always seemed to me that the best way to check crime is to deprive the criminals of their ill-gotten spoils."

Captain Carmichael stared at him thoughtfully, and then said slowly, "And there's a chance you may be right at that."

The door closed behind him.

Lester Leith smiled at his valet. "Your loyalty, Scuttle, is touching," he said. "I still don't know how the devil you ever managed to persuade Sergeant Ackley to take over half of that bet and make that endorsement on the letter."

The spy fidgeted uneasily. "Just a matter of tact, sir," he said.

Leith nodded and yawned. "By the way, Scuttle," he said, "I'll have a deposit to make in one of my charitable trust funds tomorrow—a deposit of twenty-five thousand dollars, less the usual ten per cent covering costs of collection . . ."

THE EXACT OPPOSITE

There was a glint of amusement in the eyes of Lester Leith as he lazily surveyed the valet, who was in reality no valet at all, but a police undercover operative sent by Sergeant Ackley to spy upon him.

"And so you don't like fanatical East Indian priests, Scuttle?"

"No, sir," he said. "I should hate to have them on my trail."

Lester Leith took a cigarette from the humidor and flicked his lighter.

"Scuttle," he said, "why the devil should Indian priests be on anyone's trail?"

"If I were to tell you, sir, you'd think that I was trying to interest you in another crime. As a matter of fact, sir, it was a crime which caused me to voice that sentiment about East Indian priests."

"Indeed?" said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I was thinking about the murder of George Navin."

Lester Leith looked reproachfully at the spy.

"Scuttle," he said, "is it possible that you are trying to interest me in that crime?"

"No, sir, not at all," the spy made haste to reassure him. "Although if you were interested in the crime, sir, I am satisfied that this is a case made to order for you."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Much as I like to dabble in crime problems, I don't care to let myself go on them. You see, Scuttle, it's a mental pastime with me. I like to read newspaper accounts of crimes and speculate on what might be a solution."

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "This is just the sort of a crime that you used to like to speculate about, sir."

Lester Leith sighed. "No, Scuttle," he said. "I really don't dare to do it. You see, Scuttle, Sergeant Ackley learned about that fad of mine, and he insists that I am some sort of a super-criminal who goes about hijacking robbers out of their ill-gotten spoils. There's nothing that I can do to convince the man that he is wrong. Therefore, I have found it necessary to give up my fad."

"Well," said the valet, "of course, sir, Sergeant Ackley doesn't need to know everything that happens in the privacy of your own apartment, sir."

Lester Leith shook his head sadly. "One would think so, Scuttle, and yet Sergeant Ackley seems to have some uncanny knowledge of what I am thinking about."

"Yes, sir," he said. "Have you read anything about the murder of George Navin?"

Lester Leith frowned. "Wasn't he mixed up with some kind of a gem robbery, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir," said the spy eagerly. "He was an explorer, and he had explored extensively in the Indian jungle. Perhaps you've heard something about those jungle temples, sir?"

"What about them, Scuttle?"

"India," the spy said, "is a land of wealth, of gold and rubies. In some of the primitive jungle districts the inhabitants lavish their wealth on idols. Back in a hidden part of the jungle, in a sect known as the Sivaites, there was a huge temple devoted to Vinayaka, the Prince of Evil Spirits, and in that temple was a beautiful ruby, the

size of a pigeon egg, set in a gold border which had Sanskrit letters carved in it."

Lester Leith said: "Scuttle, you're arousing my curiosity."

"I'm sorry, sir."

Leith said: "Well, we won't discuss it any more, Scuttle. The way these things go, one thing leads to another, and then— But tell me one thing: is George Navin supposed to have had that gem?"

"Yes, sir. He managed to get it from the temple, although he never admitted it, but in one of his books dealing with some of the peculiar religious sects in India, there's a photographic illustration of this gem—and authorities claim that it would have been absolutely impossible to have photographed it in the temple, that Navin must have managed to get possession of the ruby and brought it to this country."

Lester Leith said: "Wasn't that illustration reproduced in one of the newspapers after Navin's death?"

"Yes, sir. I have it here, sir."

The spy reached inside the pocket of his coat and pulled out a clipping.

Leith hesitated, then reluctantly took it. "I shouldn't look at this. But I'm going to, Scuttle. After that, don't tell me any more about it."

"Very well, sir."

Leith looked at the newspaper illustration. "There'd be a better reproduction in Navin's book, Scuttle?"

"Oh, yes, sir—a full-sized photograph."

Leith said: "And, as I gather it, Scuttle, the Hindu priests objected to the spoliation of the temple?"

"Very much, sir. It seems they attached some deep religious significance to the stone. You may remember four or five months ago, shortly after the book was published, there was an attempted robbery of Navin's house. Navin shot a man with a .45 automatic."

"An East Indian?"

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "A Hindu priest of the particular sect which had maintained the jungle temple."

Leith said: "Well, that's enough, Scuttle. I don't want to hear anything more about it. You'd have thought Navin would have taken precautions."

"Oh, but he did, sir. He hired a bodyguard—a chap named Arthur Blaire and a detective, Ed Springer. They were with him all the time."

"Just the three of them in the house?" Lester Leith asked.

"No, sir. There were four. There was a Robert Lamont, a confidential secretary."

"Accompanying Navin on his travels?" Leith asked.

The spy nodded.

"Any servants?" Leith asked.

"Only a housekeeper who came in and worked by the day."

Leith frowned and then said: "Scuttle, don't answer this if it's going to arouse my curiosity any more. But how the devil could a man get murdered if he had two bodyguards and his secretary with him all the time?"

"That, sir, is the thing the police can't understand. Mr. Navin slept in a room which was considered virtually burglar-proof. There were steel shutters on the windows, and a door which locked with a combination, and there was a guard on duty outside of the door all night."

"How did he get ventilation?"

"Through some ventilating system which was installed, and which permitted a circulation of air but wouldn't permit anyone to gain access to the room, sir."

"Don't go on. Scuttle," he said. "I simply mustn't hear about it."

"But, sir," said the spy wheedlingly, "you have heard so much now that it certainly wouldn't hurt to go on and have your natural curiosity satisfied."

Leith sighed. "Very well, Scuttle," he said. "What happened?"

The spy spoke rapidly. "Navin went to bed, sir. Blaire and Springer, the bodyguards, made the rounds of the room, making certain that the steel shutters were locked on the inside, and that the windows were closed and locked. That was about ten o'clock at night. About ten forty Bob Lamont, the secretary, received an important telegram which he wanted to take up to Mr. Navin. He had the bodyguards open the door, and call Navin softly to find out if he was asleep. Navin was sitting up in bed reading.

"They were in there for fifteen or twenty minutes. The guards don't know exactly what happened, because they sat outside on guard, but apparently it was, as Lamont says, just an ordinary business conference. Then Lamont came out, and the guards closed the door. About midnight Arthur Blaire retired, and Ed Springer kept the first watch until four o'clock in the morning. At four, Blaire came on and relieved Springer, and at nine o'clock the secretary came in with the morning mail.

"That was part of the custom, sir. The secretary was the first to go into the room with the morning mail, and he discussed it while Mr. Navin tubbed and shaved.

"The guard opened the door, and Lamont went in.

"The guard heard him say, 'Good morning,' to Mr. Navin, and walk across the room to open the shutters. Then suddenly he heard Lamont give an exclamation.

"George Navin had been murdered by having his throat cut. Everything in the room had been ransacked; even the furniture had been taken to pieces."

Lester Leith made no attempt to disguise his interest now.

"What time was the crime committed, Scuttle?" he asked. "The autopsy surgeon could tell that."

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "At approximately four A.M., sir."

"How did the murderer get into the room?" asked Lester Leith.

"There, sir," said the valet, "is where the police are baffled. The windows were all closed, and the shutters were all locked on the inside."

"And the murder was committed at just about the time the guards were being changed, eh?" said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," said the valet.

"So that either one of the guards might be suspected, eh, Scuttle?" The valet said: "As a matter of fact, sir, both of them are under suspicion. But they have excellent references."

"Well," said Lester Leith, "did the murderer get the ruby, Scuttle?"

"Well, sir, the ruby wasn't in that bedroom at all. The ruby was kept in a specially constructed safe which was in a secret hiding place in the house. No one knew of the existence of that safe, with the exception of George Navin and the two bodyguards. Also, of course, the secretary. Naturally, after discovering the murder, the men went immediately to the safe and opened it. They found that the stone was gone. The police have been unable to find any fingerprints on the safe, but they did discover something else which is rather mystifying.

"The police are satisfied that the murderer entered through one of the windows on the east side of the room. There are tracks in the soft soil of the garden beneath the window, and there are the round marks embedded in the soil where the ends of a bamboo ladder were placed on the ground."

"Bamboo, eh, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. That, of course, would indicate that the murderers were Indian, sir."

"But," said Lester Leith, "how could they get through a steel shutter locked on the inside, murder a man, get out through a window, close the window, and leave the shutter still locked on the inside?"

"That is the point, sir."

"Then," said Lester Leith, "the bodyguards weren't mixed up in it. If they were mixed up in it, they would have let the murderer come in through the door.

"But," went on Lester Leith, "there is no evidence as to how the murderer could have secured the gem."

"That's quite true, sir."

"What are the police doing?"

"The police are questioning all the men. That is, sir, the servants and the bodyguards. Lamont left the house right after talking with Navin, and went to a secret conference with Navin's attorney, a man by the name of During. During had his stenographer there, a young lady named Edith Skinner, so that Lamont can account for every minute of his time."

"Do I understand that the conference lasted all night?"

"Yes, sir. The conference was very important. It had to do with certain legal matters in connection with income tax and publishing rights."

"But that's such an unusual time for a conference," said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," said the valet, "but it couldn't be helped. Mr. Lamont was very busy with Mr. Navin. It seems that Navin was rather a peculiar individual, and he demanded a great deal of attention. As soon as the lawyer said that the examination of the records and things would take a period of over eight hours, Navin made so much trouble that Lamont finally agreed to work all one night."

"What time did Lamont leave the conference?" asked Leith.

"About eight o'clock in the morning. They went down to breakfast, and then Lamont drove out to the house in time to get the morning mail ready for Mr. Navin."

"The police, of course, are coming down pretty hard on Blaire and Springer, eh, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir, because it would have been almost impossible for anyone to have entered that room without the connivance of one of the watchmen. And then again, sir, the fact that the murder was timed

to take place when the watchmen were changing their shift would seem to indicate that either Blaire was a party to the crime, and fixed the time so that he could put the blame on Springer, or that Springer was the guilty one, and had committed the crime just as soon as he came on duty so that suspicion would attach to Blaire."

"Rather a neat problem, I should say," said Lester Leith. "One

that will keep Sergeant Ackley busy."

"Yes, sir," said the valet, "and it just goes to show how ingenious the Hindus are."

"Yes," said Lester Leith dreamily, "it's a very ingenious murder—save for one thing."

The valet's eyes glistened with eagerness.

"What," he asked, "is that one thing, sir?"

"No, no, Scuttle," he said. "If I should tell you, that would be violating the pact which I have made with myself. I have determined that I wouldn't work out any more academic crime solutions."

"I would like very much, sir," said the valet coaxingly, "to know what that one thing is."

Lester Leith took a deep breath.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Do not tempt me."

Lester Leith reclined in the long chair, his feet crossed on the cushions, his eyes watching the cigarette smoke.

"Do you know, Scuttle," he said, almost dreamily, "I am tempted to conduct an experiment."

"An experiment, sir?"

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "A psychological experiment. It would, however, require certain things. I would want three fifty-dollar bills and fifty one-dollar bills, Scuttle. I would want a diamond tiepin, an imitation of the ruby which was stolen from Navin's house, and a very attractive chorus girl."

Edward H. Beaver, undercover man who was working directly under Sergeant Arthur Ackley, but who was known to Lester Leith as "Scuttle," surveyed the police sergeant across the battered top of the desk at Headquarters.

Sergeant Ackley blinked his crafty eyes at the undercover man and said: "Give me that list again, Beaver."

"Three fifty-dollar bills, fifty one-dollar bills, a large diamond stick-pin, an imitation of the ruby which was stolen, and a chorus girl."

Sergeant Ackley slammed the pencil down.

"He was taking you for a ride," he said.

The undercover man shook his head stubbornly.

"No, he wasn't," he said. "It's just the way he works. Every time he starts on one of his hijacking escapades, he asks for a bunch of stuff that seems so absolutely crazy there's no sense to it. But every time so far those things have all turned out to be part of a carefully laid plan which results in victory for Leith and defeat for the crooks—and for us."

Sergeant Ackley made a gesture of emphatic dismissal.

"Beaver," he said, "the man is simply stringing you along this time. He couldn't possibly use these things to connect up this crime. As a matter of fact, we have evidence now which indicates very strongly that the crime was actually committed by three Hindus. We've got a straight tip from a stool pigeon who is covering the Hindu section here."

The spy insisted: "It doesn't make any difference, Sergeant, whether or not Hindus committed the crime. I'm telling you that Lester Leith is serious about this, and that he's going to use these things to work out a solution that will leave *him* in possession of that ruby."

"No," went on Sergeant Ackley, "you have overplayed your hand, Beaver. You went too far trying to get him to take an interest in this crime."

"But," protested the harassed spy, "what else could I do? Every time he pulls a job, you come down on him, triumphantly certain that you've cornered him at last, and every time he squirms out of the corner and leaves you holding the sack. As a result, he knows that you have some method of finding out what he is doing all the time. It's a wonder to me that he doesn't suspect me."

"Well," said Sergeant Ackley coldly, "you don't need to wonder any more, Beaver, because he does suspect you. He wouldn't have given you all this line of hooey unless he did."

"If it's hooey," snapped Beaver, "he's spending a lot of money."

"How do you mean?"

Beaver unfolded the morning paper which lay on the sergeant's desk.

"Take a look at the Classified Advertising Section," he said.

"Wanted: A young woman of pleasing personality and attractive looks, who has had at least three years experience on the stage in a chorus, preferably in a musical comedy or burlesque. She must have been out of work for at least eight months."

"And here's another one," said Beaver, and he pointed to another ad.

"Wanted: Ambitious young man to learn detective work at my expense. Must be a man who has had no previous experience and who knows nothing of routine police procedure. I want to train a detective who has a fresh outlook, entirely untrammeled by conventional ideas of police routine. All expenses will be paid, in addition to a generous salary. Preferably someone who has recently arrived from a rural community."

Sergeant Ackley sat back in his chair. "I'll be-"

"Now, then," said the spy, "if he doesn't intend to do something about that Navin murder, what the devil does he want to go to all this trouble for?"

"It doesn't make sense, Beaver," Ackley said. "No matter how you look at it, it's crazy."

The spy shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps," he said, "that's why he's always so successful."

"How do you mean, Beaver?"

"Because his stuff doesn't make sense, Sergeant. It's unconventional and so absolutely unique, there's no precedent to help you."

Sergeant Ackley fished a cigar from his waistcoat pocket.

"Beaver," he said, "the real standard of a good detective is his ability to separate the wheat from the chaff. Now, I'm willing to admit that Leith has done some crazy things before, and they've always worked out. But this is once it won't happen."

"Well," said the undercover man, getting to his feet, "you can have it your own way, but I'm willing to bet he's up to something. I'll bet you fifty dollars against that watch that you're so proud of."

Cupidity glittered in Sergeant Ackley's eyes. "Bet me what?"

"Bet you," said Beaver, "that he uses every one of these things to work out a scheme by which he lifts that Indian ruby, and does it all so cleverly that you can't pin anything on him."

Sergeant Ackley's broad hand smacked down on the top of the desk.

"Beaver," he said, "your language verges on insubordination. Just by way of disciplining you, I am going to take that bet. Fifty dollars against my watch.

"However, Beaver, if he is going to use other means to catch that murderer and hijack the ruby, the bet is off. He's got to do it by these particular means."

"That's the bet," said Beaver.

"And you've got to keep me posted as to everything that he's doing, so that if he should use all of the stuff as a smokescreen and try to get the ruby under cover of all this hooey, we can still catch him."

"Certainly," said the undercover man.

Lester Leith smiled urbanely at his valet. "Scuttle," he said, "this is Miss Dixie Dormley, and Mr. Harry Vare. Miss Dormley is a young woman who is doing some special work for me. She has had rather extensive stage experience, but has recently been out of work. In the position that I want her to fill, it will be necessary that she have some rather striking clothes, and I want you to go around with her to the various shops, let her pick out what clothing she desires, and see that it is charged to me."

The valet blinked his eyes.

"Very good, sir," he said. "What is the limit in regard to price, sir?"

"No limit, Scuttle. Also, I have arranged for Miss Dormley to have the apartment next to us, temporarily," said Lester Leith. "She will live there—the one on the left."

"Yes, sir," said the valet.

"And Mr. Harry Vare," said Lester Leith, "is the fortunate young man who has won the free scholarship in my school of deductive reasoning."

The valet stared at Harry Vare.

Vare met that stare with eyes that were hard and appraising. He narrowed the lids and scrutinized the undercover operative as though he were trying to hypnotize the man.

"Harry Vare," said Lester Leith suavely, "is a young man from the country who has recently come to the city in search of some employment which would be worthy of his talents. He felt that he had outgrown the small town in which he lived. He is possessed of that first essential for detective work—an imagination which makes him see an ulterior motive in every action, a crime in every set of circumstances."

The undercover operative was dignified.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but as I understand it, sir, most of the real detectives are somewhat the other way. They regard it as a business, sir."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Sergeant Ackley is one of the shrewdest

detectives that I know, and you must admit, Scuttle, that he has one of those imaginations which makes him see a crime in everything."

The girl looked from face to face with a twinkle in her eyes. She was a beautiful woman.

"Mr. Vare," said Lester Leith, "will have the apartment on the right—the one adjoining us. He will be domiciled there temporarily, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir," said the valet. "May I ask, what are the duties of these persons?"

"Mr. Vare is going to be a detective," said Lester Leith gravely. "He will detect."

"What will he detect?"

"That is the interesting part of having a professional detective about, Scuttle. One never knows what he is going to detect. There is Sergeant Ackley, for instance. He detects so many things which seem utterly unreasonable at the time, and then, after mature investigation and reflection, they seem to have an entirely different complexion."

The spy cleared his throat.

"And the young lady, sir?"

"Miss Dormley," said Lester Leith, "will engage in dramatic acting upon the stage which was so well described by Shakespeare."

"What stage is that?" asked the undercover man.

"The world," said Lester Leith.

"Very good, sir," the valet said. "And when do I start on this shopping tour?"

"Immediately," said Lester Leith. "And by the way, Scuttle, did you get me the money and the diamond stick-pin?"

The valet opened a box which he took from his pocket.

"Yes, sir," he said. "You wanted rather a large diamond with something of a fault in it, something that wasn't too expensive, I believe you said."

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "That's right, Scuttle."

"This is sent on approval," said the valet. "The price tag is on the pin, sir."

Lester Leith looked at the diamond pin, and whistled.

"Rather a low price, Scuttle," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the valet. "There's quite a flaw in the diamond, although it doesn't appear until you examine it closely."

"And the money?"

"Yes, sir," said the valet, and took from his pocket a sheaf of bank notes.

Lester Leith gravely arranged them so that the fifties were on the outside. Then he rolled them and snapped the roll with an elastic.

Lester Leith turned to Vare.

"Vare," he said, "are you ready to start detecting?"

"I thought I was going to be given a course of instruction," he said.

"You are," said Lester Leith, "but you are going to learn by a new method. You know, they used to teach law by reading out of law books, and then they decided that that wasn't the proper way to give the pupils instruction. They switched to what is known as the case method—that is, Vare, they read cases to them and let the students delve into the reported cases until they found the legal principles which had been applied to the facts."

"Yes, sir," said Vare.

"That is the way you are going to learn detective work," said Lester Leith. "By the case method. Are you ready to start?"

Vare nodded.

Lester Leith removed the tiepin from his tie, placed it on the table, and inserted the diamond stickpin.

"Very well, Vare," he said. "Get your hat and come with me. You are about to receive the first lesson."

There was the usual crowd in front of the ticket windows of the big railroad station. Everywhere there was noise, bustle, and confusion.

"Now," said Lester Leith to Harry Vare, "keep about twenty feet behind me and watch sharply. See if you can find anyone who looks like a crook."

Vare cocked a professional eye at the crowd.

"They all look like crooks," he said.

Lester Leith nodded gravely.

"Vare," he said, "you are showing the true detective instincts. But I want you to pick out someone who looks like a crook we can pin something definite on."

"I don't see exactly what you mean," said Vare.
"You will," said Lester Leith. "Just follow me."

Lester Leith pushed his way through the crowd, with Vare tagging along behind him. From time to time Lester Leith pulled out the roll of bills and counted them, apparently anxious to see that they

were safe. Then he snapped the elastic back on the roll and pushed it back in his pocket.

Leith kept in the most congested portions of the big depot.

Twice he was bumped into, and each time by a sad-faced individual with mournful eyes and a drooping mouth.

The man was garbed in a dark suit, and his tie was conservative. Everything about him blended into a single drab personality which would attract no attention.

Finally, Lester Leith walked to a closed ticket window, where there was a little elbow room.

"Well, Vare," he said, "did you see anyone?"

Vare said: "Well, I saw several that looked like crooks, but I couldn't see anyone that I could pick out as being a certain particular crook. That is, I couldn't find any proof."

Lester Leith put his hand in his pocket, and then suddenly jumped backwards.

"Robbed!" he said.

Vare stared at him with sagging jaw.

"Robbed?" he asked.

"Robbed," said Lester Leith. "My money—it's gone!"

He pulled his hand from his trousers pocket, and disclosed a slit which had been cut in the cloth so that the contents of the pocket could be reached from the outside.

"Pickpockets," said Harry Vare.

"And you didn't discover them," Leith said.

Vare fidgeted uneasily.

"There was quite a crowd," he said, "and of course I couldn't see everything."

Lester Leith shook his head sadly.

"I can't give you a high mark on the first lesson, Vare," he said. "Now let's take a cab and go home."

"Your tiepin is safe, anyway," said Vare.

Lester Leith gave a sudden start, reached his hand to his tie, and pulled out the diamond scarf-pin.

He looked at the diamond and nodded, then suddenly pointed to the pin.

"Look," he said, "the man tried to take it off with nippers. You can see where they left their mark on the pin. I must have pulled away just as he was doing it, so that he didn't get a chance to get the diamond."

Vare's eyes were large; his face showed consternation.

"Really," said Lester Leith, "you have had two lessons in one, and I can't give you a high mark on either. You should have detected the person who was putting nippers on my pin."

Vare looked crestfallen.

Leith said: "Oh, well, you can't expect to become a first-class detective overnight. That's one of the things that training is for. But we'll go back to the apartment and I'll change my clothes, and you can sit back and concentrate for an hour or two on what you saw, and see if you can remember anything significant."

But a little later Lester Leith returned to the depot—alone. Once more he mingled with the crowd, moving aimlessly about, but this time his eyes were busy scanning the faces of the stream of people.

He noticed the man in the dark suit with the mournful countenance, moving aimlessly about, a newspaper in his hands, his manner that of one who is waiting patiently for a wife who was to have met him an hour ago.

Lester Leith walked behind this man, keeping him in sight.

After some fifteen minutes, Leith shortened the distance between them and tapped the man sharply on the shoulder.

"I want to talk with you," he said.

The man's face changed expression. The look of mournful list-lessness vanished, and the eyes became hard and wary.

"You ain't got nothing on me."

Lester Leith laughed.

"On the contrary," he said, "you have got something of mine on you—a roll of bills with some fifties on the outside and dollar bills in between. Also, you have the scarf-pin which you just nipped from that fat gentleman with the scarlet tie."

The man backed away, and turned as though getting ready to run.

Lester Leith said: "I'm not a detective. I just want to talk with you. In fact, I want to employ you."

The pickpocket looked at him with eyes that were wide with surprise.

"Employ me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "I have been strolling around here all afternoon looking for a good pickpocket."

"I'm not a pickpocket," said the man.

Lester Leith paid no attention to the man's protestation of innocence.

"I am," he said, "running a school for young detectives. I want to

employ you as an assistant instructor. I have an idea that the ordinary training of police officers and detectives is exceedingly haphazard. I am looking for someone who can give my students an education in picking pockets."

"What's the pay?"

"Well," said Lester Leith, "you can keep the watch that you got from the tall thin man, the scarf-pin which you nipped from the fleshy man, and you can keep the roll of bills which you cut from my trousers pocket. In addition to that, you will draw regular compensation of one hundred dollars a day, and if you feel like risking your liberty, you can keep anything which you can pick up on the side."

"How do you mean, 'on the side'?"

"By the practice of your profession, of course," said Lester Leith. The pickpocket stared at him.

"This," he said, "is some kind of a smart game to get me to commit myself."

Lester Leith reached to his inside pocket and took out a well-filled wallet. He opened the wallet, and the startled eyes of the pickpocket caught sight of a number of one-hundred-dollar bills.

Gravely Lester Leith took out one of these hundred-dollar bills and extended it to the pickpocket.

"This," he said, "is the first day's salary."

The man took the one-hundred-dollar bill, and his eyes followed the wallet as Lester Leith returned it to his pocket.

"Okay, boss," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Just meet me," said Lester Leith, "at certain regular times and places. Your first job will be to meet me here at nine thirty tonight. I will write a bunch of instructions on a piece of paper, and put that piece of paper in my coat pocket. You can slip the paper out of the coat pocket and follow instructions. Don't let on that you know me at all, unless I should speak to you first."

The pickpocket nodded.

"Okay," he said. "I'll be here at nine thirty. In the meantime, I'll walk as far as your taxicab with you and talk over details. My name is Sid Bentley. What's yours?"

"Leith," Lester Leith told him.

"Pleased to meet you."

After they had finished shaking hands, Lester Leith started toward the taxicab and Bentley walked on his right side, talking rapidly. "I don't know how you made me, Leith," he said, "but you can believe it or not, it's the first time I've ever been picked up by anybody. I used to be a sleight-of-hand artist on the stage, and then when business got bad, I decided to go out and start work. I haven't a criminal record and the police haven't got a thing on me."

"That's fine," beamed Lester Leith. "You're exactly the man I

want. I'll meet you here at nine thirty, eh, Bentley?"

"Nine thirty it is, Captain."

Lester Leith hailed a taxicab. As it swung into the circle in front of the depot, he turned casually to the pickpocket.

"By the way, Bentley," he said, "please don't use that knife. You've

already ruined one good suit for me."

As Lester Leith spoke, his left hand shot out and clamped around the wrist of the pickpocket. The light gleamed on the blade of a razor-like knife with which Bentley had been about to cut Lester Leith's coat.

Bentley looked chagrined for a moment, and then sighed.

"You said that it'd be all right for me to pick up anything I could on the side, Captain," he protested.

Lester Leith grinned.

"Well," he said, "I had better amplify that. You can pick up anything you can on the side, provided you leave my pockets alone."

Bentley matched Lester Leith's grin.

"Okay, Captain," he said. "That's a go."

Lester Leith climbed in the taxicab and returned to his apartment.

A vision of loveliness greeted him as he opened the door. Dixie Dormley had adorned herself in garments which looked as though they had been tailored to order in the most exclusive shops.

She smiled a welcome to Lester Leith.

"I kept the cost as low as I could," she said, "in order to get the effect that you wanted."

"You certainly got the effect," complimented Lester Leith, staring at her with very evident approval. "Yes, I think you have done very well, indeed, and we will all go to dinner tonight—the four of us. You, Miss Dormley, Mr. Vare, and, Scuttle, I'm going to include you too."

The spy blinked his eyes. "Yes, sir."

"By the way," said Lester Leith, "did you have the imitation ruby made?"

The spy nodded.

"It's rather a swell affair," he said, "so far as the ruby is concerned.

The gold setting is rather cleverly done too. The jeweler insisted upon doing it in a very soft gold. He said that the Indian gold was very yellow and very soft, without much alloy in it. He's duplicated the border design very accurately."

"Quite right, Scuttle," said Lester Leith. "The man knows what

he is doing. Let's see it."

The spy handed Lester Leith a little casket, which Leith opened. The girl exclaimed in admiration.

"Good heavens," she said, "it looks genuine!"

Lester Leith nodded. "It certainly does," he said. "They are able to make excellent imitations of rubies these days."

He lifted the imitation jewel from the case and dropped it care-

lessly in his side pocket.

"All right, Dixie," he said. "If you'll dress for dinner, we'll leave rather early. I have an important appointment at nine thirty. By the way, I don't want either of you to mention to a living soul that this ruby is an imitation."

At dinner that evening Lester Leith was in rare form. He was suave and courteous, acting very much the gentleman, and discharging his duties as host. It was when the dessert had been cleared away that Leith gravely surveyed Harry Vare's countenance.

"Vare," he said, "you have had your first lesson this afternoon.

Do you think that you have profited by it?"

Vare flushed.

"I'll say one thing," he said, "no pickpocket will ever get near you again as long as I'm around."

Lester Leith nodded.

"That's fine," he said. "Now then, I have a rather valuable bauble here that I want to have guarded carefully. I am going to ask you to put it in your pocket."

And Lester Leith slipped from his pocket the imitation ruby and

passed it across the table to Vare.

Vare gave a gasp, and his eyes bulged.

"Good heavens," he said, "this is worth a fortune!"

Leith shrugged. "I am making no comments, Vare," he said, "on its value. It is merely something which is entrusted to you for safe-keeping, as a part of your training in detective work."

Vare slipped the gem hurriedly into his pocket.

Lester Leith caught the eye of the waiter and secured the check, which he paid.

"I want you folks to take a little walk with me," he said. "Vare is going to have another lesson as a detective, and I would like to have all of you present."

The spy was plainly ill at ease.

"You want me there also, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Lester Leith.

"Very well, sir," said the spy.

Leith helped the young woman on with her wraps, saw that she was seated comfortably in the taxicab, and told the driver to take them to the depot.

The spy stared at him curiously.

"You're leaving town, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said Lester Leith. "We're just going down to the depot, and I'm going to walk around the way I did this afternoon. Vare is going to see that my pocket isn't picked."

There was not as large a crowd in the depot at night, and Lester Leith had some difficulty in finding a crowd of sufficient density to suit his purpose. In his side pocket was a note:

"The young man who is following me around has an imitation ruby in his pocket. He is watching me to make certain that no one picks my pocket. See if you can get the ruby from him, and after you have it, return it to me later."

Bentley, the pickpocket, stood on the outskirts of a crowd of people who were waiting in line at a ticket window, and gave Lester Leith a significant glance. Leith gestured toward his pocket.

Leith pushed his way into the crowd, and, as he did so, felt Bentley's fingers slip the printed instructions from his pocket.

Thereafter, Lester Leith wandered aimlessly about the depot, until suddenly he heard a choked cry from Harry Vare.

Lester Leith turned and retraced his steps to the young man, who was standing with a sickly gray countenance, his eyes filled with despair.

"What is it?" asked Lester Leith.

Vare indicated a gaping cut down the side of his coat and through his vest.

"I put that gem in the inside of my vest," he said, "where I knew that it would be safe from pickpockets, and look what happened!"

Lester Leith summoned the undercover man.

"Scuttle," he said, "will you notice what has happened? This young man whom I was training to be a detective has allowed the property with which I entrusted him to be stolen."

The valet blinked.

"I didn't see anyone, sir," he said, "and I was keeping my own eye peeled."

"Scuttle," Lester Leith said, "I am going to ask you to take Vare back to his apartment. Let him sit down and meditate carefully for two hours upon everything that happened and every face he saw while he was here at the depot. I want to see if he can possibly identify the man who is guilty of picking his pocket."

Vare said humbly: "I'm afraid, sir, that you picked a poor student."

Lester Leith smiled.

"Tut, tut, Vare," he said, "that's something for me to determine. I told you that I was going to give you an education, and I am. You're getting a free scholarship as well as wages. So don't worry about it. Go on to your apartment, and sit down and concentrate."

Vare said: "It certainly is wonderful of you to take the thing this way."

"That's all right, Vare."

As the undercover man took Vare's arm and piloted him toward a taxicab, Lester Leith turned to Dixie Dormley with a smile.

"I've got to meet a party here in a few minutes," he said, "and then we can go and dance."

They continued to hang around the depot for fifteen or twenty minutes. Lester Leith began to frown and to consult his wrist watch. Suddenly Sid Bentley, the pickpocket, materialized through one of the doorways and hurried toward them.

"It's okay," he said.

Leith frowned at him.

"You took long enough doing it," he said.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," Bentley said, "but there was one thing that I had to do. You should have figured it out yourself, Chief."

"What was that?"

"I had to go to a good fence and make sure that the thing I had was an imitation," said Bentley.

"Well," Leith said, "there's nothing like being frank."

"That's the way I figure it, Chief," he said. "You know, I've got a duty to you, but I've got a duty to my profession, too. I certainly would have been a dumb hick to have had my hands on a fortune and let it slip."

Lester Leith felt the weight of the jewel in his pocket. He nodded and turned away.

"That's all right, Bentley," he said. "You meet me here tomorrow night at seven o'clock, and in the meantime there won't be anything more for you unless I should get in touch with you. Can you give me a telephone number where I can get in touch with you if I should need you?"

The pickpocket reached in his pocket and took out a card.

"Here you are, Chief," he said. "Just ring up that number and leave word that you'll be at some particular place at some particular time. Don't try to talk with me over the telephone. Just leave that message. Then you go to that place, and I'll be hanging around. If the thing looks safe to me, I'll be there. And if I don't hear from you I'll be here tomorrow night at seven."

"Okay," said Leith.

"Dixie," he said, "I've got something for you to do which is rather confidential. I am going to take you to a night club where there's a chap by the name of Bob Lamont. He makes this night club his regular hangout. He will probably have a companion with him, but, from what I've heard, he has a roving eye. I want you to see to it that his eye roves your way, and that you dance with him. After that, we'll try and make a foursome if we can. If we can't, you can date him up for tomorrow night. Think you can do it?"

"Brother," she said, "in these clothes, if I can't stop any roving masculine eye, I'm going out of show business."

Sergeant Arthur Ackley banged upon the door of the apartment. Bolts clicked back as Harry Vare opened the door and stared stupidly at Sergeant Ackley.

Sergeant Ackley pushed his way into the apartment without a word, slammed the door shut behind him, strode across the room to a chair, and sat down.

"Well, young man," he said, "you've got yourself into a pretty pickle."

Harry Vare blinked and started to talk, but words failed him.

Sergeant Ackley flipped back his coat so that Harry Vare's eyes could rest on the gold badge pinned to his vest.

"Well," he said, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I—I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do," said Sergeant Ackley. "You're teamed up with this super-crook and you're hashing up a scheme to assist in hijacking a big ruby."

Vare shook his head.

"No, sir," he said, "you're mistaken. I had a big ruby which was given to me to keep but somebody stole it."

Sergeant Ackley let his eyes bore into those of Harry Vare. Then he got to his feet, reached out and thrust a broad hand to the collar of Vare's coat, twisting it tightly.

"Well," he said, "it'll be about ten years for you, and you'd better come along."

Vare stared at Sergeant Ackley with pathetic eyes.

"I haven't done anything," he said.

Sergeant Ackley eyed the man shrewdly.

"Listen," he said, "did you ever heard of George Navin?"

"You mean the man who was murdered?" asked Harry Vare.

Ackley nodded.

"I read something about it in the paper," said Vare.

"All right," said Sergeant Ackley. "Navin was murdered for a big Indian ruby. Bob Lamont was his secretary. Does that mean anything to you?"

"No, sir," said Vare. "Not a thing."

"All right," said Sergeant Ackley. "I'll tell you a few things, and you can see how much it means to you. This fellow Lester Leith that you're working for is one of the cleverest crooks this city has ever produced. He makes a living out of robbing crooks of their ill-gotten spoils. He's slick and he's clever, and he usually dopes out the solution of a crime in advance of the police, and then shakes down the crook before we get to him."

"I didn't know that." said Harry Vare.

"Well, maybe you did, and maybe you didn't," said Sergeant Ackley. "That's something for you to tell the jury when you come up for trial. But here's something else that you may like to listen to. Lester Leith picked up this chorus girl, and the two of them went out last night after they left you and picked up Bob Lamont and some other woman.

"Lester Leith is pretty much of a gentleman, and he wears his clothes well, and this chorus girl he had with him looked like a million dollars in a lot of high-priced clothes. The night club was more or less informal, and she gave Bob Lamont the eye. Bob fell for her and started to dance with her, and before the evening was finished they had moved to another table and were having a nice little foursome."

"But," said Harry Vare, gathering courage, "what has that got to do with me?"

Sergeant Ackley studied him in shrewd appraisal.

"So," he said, "they made another date for tonight, and the four of them are going out."

Harry Vare suddenly caught his breath. His eyes grew wide and dark with apprehension.

"Good heavens!" he said.

Sergeant Ackley nodded. "I thought so," he said.

Panic showed in Vare's face.

"You've got just ten seconds to come clean," said Sergeant Ackley. "If you come clean and give me the low-down on this thing, and agree to work with me, there's a chance that we may give you immunity from prosecution. Otherwise, you're going to jail for at least ten years."

Harry didn't need ten seconds. He was blurting out speech almost before Sergeant Ackley had finished.

"I didn't know the name," he said, "and I didn't know it was Lamont until you told me. But Lester Leith hired me to study detective work. He had his pocket picked once yesterday, and then gave me a jewel to carry, and it was picked from my pocket. I felt all broken up about it, but Mr. Leith said that it was all right, I'd have to learn a step at a time.

"He told me that tonight he was going to teach me how to make an arrest. He said that I was to arrest him, just as though he had been a crook. He said that he was going out to a dinner party tonight with another man and a woman, and that they would probably wind up at the man's apartment; that after they got to the apartment, he had it fixed up that Dixie Dormley—that's the chorus girl—was to take the other girl out for a few moments, and that, as soon as that happened, I was to come busting in as a detective and accuse Lester Leith of some crime, handcuff him, and lead him out."

Sergeant Ackley frowned. "That's everything you know about it?" "Everything," said Harry Vare; "but I get more instructions later."

"Well," Ackley said, "I'm going to give you a break. If you do exactly as I tell you, and don't tell Lester Leith that I was here, I'll see that you get a break and aren't arrested."

"That's all right, officer," Harry Vare said. "I'll do anything you say—"

Lester Leith handed Sid Bentley, the mournful-faced pickpocket, a one-hundred-dollar bill. "Wages for another day," he said.

Bentley pocketed the hundred and looked with avaricious eyes at

the wallet which Leith returned to his breast pocket. "Speaking professionally," he said, "you'd do better to carry your bills in a fold. That breast-pocket stuff is particularly vulnerable."

"I know it," Leith said, "but I like to have my money where I can

get at it."

Bentley nodded, his milk-mild eyes without expression. "I," he said, "like people who carry their money where I can get at it."

"Remember our bargain," Leith said.

"What do you suppose makes me feel so bad about getting a hundred bucks?" Bentley asked. "I'm just figuring I made a poor bargain."

"You mean the work's too hard?"

"No, that there are too many restrictions. I'm commencing to think I could make a good living just following you around."

Leith lowered his voice. "Where," he asked, "do you suppose I make all this money?"

Bentley said: "Now, buddy, you've got me interested."

Leith said: "We're working on the same side of the street."

"You don't mean you're a dip?"

"No, but I'm a crook. I'm a confidence man."

"What's the game?" Bentley asked.

Leith said: "I have different rackets. Right now, it's sticking a sucker with that imitation ruby. I show the ruby to the man I'm aiming to trim. I tell him I found it on the street, that I don't know whether it's any good or not, that I presume it isn't good, but that even as an imitation, it should have some value. I ask him what he thinks about it.

"If he's a real gem expert, I know it from what he says. He tells me to go home and forget it. I thank him, and that's all there is to it. But if he's a little dubious about whether it's genuine, I gradually let him think I'm a sucker. You see, this ruby is the exact duplicate of a valuable ruby that has been in the newspapers."

Bentley said: "That's what fooled me about it the first time I saw it."

"You recognized it?"

"Sure."

"Well," Leith said, "lots of other people will, too. They'll think it's the genuine priceless ruby. Some of them will want to buy it. Some of them won't. If the guy offers me anything like five hundred dollars for it, I'm perfectly willing to sell."

Bentley said: "I'm still listening."

"The big trouble," Leith said, "is the risk."

"How do you mean?"

"I've got too many of them out," Leith said. "These imitations cost me about fifteen dollars apiece. I've been playing the racket for a week."

"You're afraid some of the suckers have made a squawk?"

"Yes."

Bentley said: "I know just how you feel. When a racket gets hot, you know you should leave it, but there's still coin in it, so you want to hang on."

Leith said: "That's where you come in."

"What do you mean?"

Leith said: "I want you to follow me around from now on whenever I'm going to make a sale."

"What do I do?"

"Just this," Leith said. "A cop can't make a pinch until after I've made a sale. In order to do that, they'll have to plant a ringer on me for a sucker, and have the payments made to me in marked money."

"No, they won't," Bentley said. "You're all wet there, brother. They can either have the marked money on you, or they can pinch both you and the sucker and hold the sucker as a material witness."

Leith said: "That last is what I'm afraid of. If that happens, I want you to get the evidence."

"You mean from the sucker?"

"Yes."

"Listen, brother. That evidence will be just as hot as a stove lid. I couldn't—"

Leith took from his pocket a little cloth sack to which was attached a printed tag with a postage stamp on the tag.

"You don't keep it on you for a minute," he said. "You just beat it for the first mailbox, drop it, and let Uncle Sam do the dirty work." Bentley said: "That's more like it."

"Whenever you do that you get a five-hundred-dollar bonus."

"And that's all I have to do?"

"That's all."

"And my cut is still a hundred bucks a day."

"That's right. You just have to follow me around."

"Lead me to it," Bentley said. "But you'll have to tell me when you're going to make a deal."

Leith said: "In about an hour, Miss Dormley, the young lady who

was with me last night, and I are going out to dinner with another couple. I've fixed things up with Miss Dormley so she'll get the other girl out of the way. That will leave me alone with the man. I figure I can put the deal across with him."

"I'll be tagging along."

Leith said: "Carry this mailing sack where you can put your hand on it in an instant. Don't ever be caught without it."

"Listen, buddy," Bentley said, "don't think I was born yesterday. If you think I want to be caught with goods that will hook me up as your confederate, you're cockeyed. And don't pull your stuff in a place where there isn't a mailbox on every corner, because if you do, it's just your hard luck."

Sergeant Arthur Ackley stared reproachfully at Beaver, the undercover operative. "Right under your nose, Beaver," he said, "and you muffed it."

The spy's face colored. "What do you mean, I muffed it? I'm the one that told you he was going after that ruby."

Sergeant Ackley said: "You argued a lot, Beaver, and became personally offensive, but you didn't give me anything constructive."

"What do you mean, constructive?"

"You didn't even smell a rat when he brought that green kid in to act as a detective," Ackley said.

Beaver sighed. "Oh, what's the use. Just don't forget that we have a bet. If all those various things I told you about fit into his plan to get the ruby, I win your watch."

"Not at all, Beaver," said Ackley. "You have overlooked one little fact. It was to have been done so cleverly that I couldn't pin anything on him. You overlooked that little thing, Beaver, and that's going to cost you fifty bucks—because I've already got it pinned on him."

Beaver said: "I suppose you know every step in his campaign."

Sergeant Ackley gloated. "You bet I do."

The spy scraped back his chair and got to his feet.

Sergeant Ackley said: "Don't go to bed until after midnight, Beaver. I'll be calling you some time before then to come down to head-quarters. Leith will be booked and in a cell. Then you can have the pleasure of telling him that you helped put him there—and you can pay over the fifty bucks to me."

Beaver lunged toward the door. "You've thought you had him before," he flung back, on the threshold.

Sergeant Ackley laughed. "But this time, Beaver, I have got him.

I threw a scare into that green kid Vare, and he told me everything."

The four people left the taxicab and walked across the sidewalk to the entrance of the apartment house. Dixie Dormley, attired in soft white, was vibrantly beautiful. The other young woman, although expensively gowned, seemed drab in comparison.

Lester Leith, well-tailored, faultlessly groomed, wore his evening clothes with an air of distinction. Bob Lamont was quick and nervous. He seemed ill at ease.

The four people chatted as they went up in the elevator, and Bob Lamont opened the door of his apartment with a flourish.

It was an apartment which was well and tastefully furnished. As secretary to George Navin, Lamont had drawn a very good salary.

When the two young women were seated, Lamont went to the kitchenette to get the makings of drinks.

Lester Leith gave a significant glance at Dixie Dormley.

She caught the glance, turned at once to the other young woman. and exclaimed, "Oh, my heavens, I left my purse in that taxicab! Or else it may have fallen out on the sidewalk; I don't know which. It seems to me that I heard something drop to the running board as I got out."

The young woman said: "Never mind, Dixie, you can telephone the taxicab company, and they'll have it in the Lost and Found Department."

"Yes," wailed Dixie, "but suppose it dropped to the running board. Then it would have spilled off at the corner."

Lester Leith reached for his hat.

"I'll run down and see."

Dixie Dormley got to her feet quickly and started to the door.

"No, please," she said. "You wait here. I can't explain, but I'd much rather go by myself, unless Vivian wants to come with me."

She flashed the other young woman a smile of invitation, and Vivian promptly arose.

"Tell Bob that we'll be right back," she said.

As the door closed behind the two women. Lester Leith strolled out into the kitchenette where Lamont was taking ice cubes from a refrigerator.

"Well, Lamont," said Lester Leith casually, "you pulled that murder pretty cleverly, didn't you?"

Lamont dropped the ice-cube tray with a clatter, and stared at Leith with bulging eyes. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Oh, you know well enough, Lamont," he said. "The police were a little bit slow in catching up with you, that's all, but the scheme wasn't really so clever. The guards shut all of the windows and locked the shutters on the inside when they went into Navin's room, but you were the last one in there. It would have been very easy for you to have moved against one of the windows and unlocked one of the shutters. Then you left the room, went directly to the safe, took out the gem, and went to your conference with the lawyer, which gave you your alibi. In the morning you walked in and locked the shutter again from the inside.

"You'd probably been bribed by the Hindus to leave one of the steel shutters unlocked, and had specified that they must break in and do the job promptly at four o'clock, so that the police would be properly confused.

"Where the police made their mistake was in thinking that whoever had committed the murder had also stolen the gem from the safe. It didn't occur to them that they could have been independent acts. And apparently, so far, it hasn't occurred to the Hindus. They thought simply that they failed to find the gem, and that Navin had placed it in some other hiding place.

"But you can't get away with it long, Lamont. The police will be here inside of half an hour."

"You're crazy!" said Lamont.

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Lamont," he said, "you're the one who's crazy. You overlooked the fact that, if the Hindus should start to talk, they had you strapped to the electric chair. And that's exactly what happened. The police got a confession out of one of the Hindus about fifteen minutes ago. My paper telephoned me."

Lamont's face was gray. "Who-who are you?" he asked.

"I'm a free-lance reporter," said Lester Leith, "who works on feature stuff for some of the leading papers. Right now I'm assigned to cover the story of your arrest in the Navin case. The newspaper knew it was going to break sometime within the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Now if you would like to pick up a little money that would come in handy when it becomes necessary to retain an attorney to represent you, you can give us an exclusive interview. In fact, the only thing for you to do is to confess and try and get a life sentence. If you want to make your confession through my newspaper, we would bring all the political pressure to bear that we could to see that you got off with life."

There was an imperative knock on the door of the apartment.

Lester Leith strolled to it casually.

"Probably the police now, Lamont."

He opened the door.

Harry Vare burst into the room.

"You're under arrest!" he snapped at Lester Leith.

Lester Leith stepped back and eyed Vare with well-simulated amazement.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he asked.

"Your name's Lamont," said Vare, "and you're under arrest for the murder of George Navin. I'm representing the Indian priests who are trying to recover the gem, and I'm going to take you to police headquarters with me right now."

Lester Leith said: "You're crazy. My name's Leith. I'm not Lamont. That's Lamont over there, the man you want. I'm working for a newspaper."

Harry Vare laughed, scornfully.

"I saw you come in here and had the doorman point out the one who lived here. He pointed to you."

"You fool," Leith said, "he made a mistake, or rather you did. He pointed to this man here, and you thought he was pointing me out."

Vare snapped a gun into view, and fished for handcuffs with his left hand.

"Hold out your wrist," he said, "or I'll blow you apart."

Lester Leith hesitated a moment, then held out his wrist, reluctantly. Vare snapped one of the handcuffs to Leith's wrist, locked the other one around his own wrist, and said, "Come on, you slicker, you're going to headquarters."

Leith said: "Listen! You're making the biggest mistake of your life. You're letting the real murderer—"

Bob Lamont laughed.

He turned to Harry Vare and said: "You're quite right, officer, that's Bob Lamont that you've got under arrest, but this comes as quite as a shock to me. I've known him for two or three years, and thought he was above reproach."

"No, he wasn't," said Vare. "He was the man who murdered Navin."

Lester Leith groaned.

"Youngster," he said, "you're making a mistake that is going to make you the laughing-stock of the city inside of twenty-four hours."

Vare muttered grimly: "Come along, Lamont."

Lester Leith sighed and accompanied Vare through the doorway to the elevator, down the elevator, across the lobby of the apartment house, and to the street.

"Well," said Leith, "that was pretty well done, Vare. You can let me loose now."

Vare took a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock of the handcuff only after considerable difficulty. His forehead was beaded with nervous perspiration, and his hand was shaking. He made two attempts to fit the key to the lock. "I can't seem to get it," he said.

Leith glanced at him sharply. "Vare," he said, "what the devil are you trying to do?"

"Nothing."

"Give me that key."

Vare didn't pass over the key but instead looked expectantly back toward the shadows.

The voice of Sergeant Ackley said: "I'll take charge now."

There was motion from the deep shadows of the doorway of an adjoining building. Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a plainclothes officer, stepped forward.

Leith said to Sergeant Ackley: "What's the meaning of this?"

Ackley said: "You should know more about it than I do, Leith. You've delivered yourself to me already handcuffed."

For a moment there was consternation on Leith's face, then he masked all expression from his face and eyes.

"Didn't expect to see me here, did you?" Sergeant Ackley asked gloatingly.

Leith said nothing.

Sergeant Ackley said to Vare: "Give me the key to those handcuffs, young man. I'll slip one off your wrist, and put it on Leith's other wrist."

Vare extended his hand. Sergeant Ackley took the key, clicked the handcuff from Vare's arm, and snapped it around Leith's other wrist.

The rapid *click-clack click-clack* of high heels as two women rounded the corner, walking rapidly, came to Leith's ears. He turned around so that the light fell full on his face.

"Why, Mr. Leith!" Dixie Dormley exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

Lester Leith said nothing.

Sergeant Ackley grinned gloatingly. "Mr. Leith," he said, "is being arrested. You probably didn't know he was a crook."

"A crook!" she exclaimed.

From the doorway of the apartment house came a hurrying figure, attired in overcoat, hat, and gloves. He carried a light suitcase in one hand, and crossed the strip of sidewalk with three swift strides. It wasn't until he started to signal for a taxicab that he became aware of the little group.

Sergeant Ackley said to the plainclothesman: "Get that guy."

Lamont heard the order, turned to look over his shoulder, then dropped the suitcase, and started to run.

"Help!" yelled Sergeant Ackley.

Lamont sprinted down the street. He turned to flash an apprehensive glance over his shoulder, and so did not see the figure of Sid Bentley as it slid out from the shadows.

There was a thud, a tangled mass of arms and legs, and then Bentley, sitting up on the sidewalk, said: "I got him for you, officer."

The plainclothesman ran up and grabbed Lamont by the collar. He jerked him to his feet, then said to Bentley: "That was fine work. I'm glad you stopped him."

"No trouble at all," Bentley said.

The officer said: "Come on back with me, and I'll give you a courtesy card which may help you out some time."

Bentley's eyes glistened. "Now, that'll be right nice of you, officer."

The officer pushed the reluctant Lamont back toward the little group which had, by this time, became a small, curious crowd. "Here he is, Sergeant," he said.

Sergeant Ackley said irritably: "All right, Lamont. You'd better come clean."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lamont said.

Sergeant Ackley laughed. "Come on, Lamont, the jig's up. You killed George Navin and got that ruby. Lester Leith hijacked it from you. Now, if you'll give us the facts, you won't be any worse off for it."

Lamont said: "I don't know what you're talking about. I—I took the custody of the ruby because—"

"Careful, Lamont," Lester Leith said sharply. "Don't put your neck in a noose."

Sergeant Ackley turned and slapped Leith across the mouth. "Keep your trap shut," he said, and to the plainclothes officer: "Go ahead and search him."

"Oh, no," Lamont shouted. "You can't do it. Navin gave it to me to keep for him. I was going to turn it over to the estate."

"Gave you what?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"The ruby."

Ackley said: "Go head, Lamont, tell the truth. You took the ruby, and then Lester Leith took it from you."

Lamont shook his head.

Sergeant Ackley ran his hands over Leith's coat. Abruptly he shot his hand into Leith's inside pocket and pulled out a chamois-skin bag. He reached inside of that bag, and the spectators gasped as the rays from the street light were reflected from a blood-red blob of brilliance.

"There it is," Sergeant Ackley said gloatingly.

Lamont stared, clapped his own hand to his breast pocket, became suddenly silent.

Sergeant Ackley said triumphantly to the crowd: "That's the way we work, folks. Give the crooks rope enough, and they hang themselves. You'll read about it in the paper tomorrow morning. Sergeant Arthur Ackley solves the Navin murder, and at the same time traps a crook who's trying to hijack the East Indian ruby. All right, boys. We're going to the station."

Leith said: "Sergeant, you're making a-"

"Shut up," Ackley said savagely. "I've been laying for you for a long time, and now I've got you."

Dixie Dormley said indignantly: "I think it's an outrage. You've struck this man when he was handcuffed. You won't let him explain."

"Shut up," Ackley growled, "or I'll take you too."

Dixie Dormley fastened glistening, defiant eyes on Sergeant Ackley. "Try to keep me from going," she said. "I'm going to be right there, and complain about your brutality."

Sid Bentley sidled up to the plainclothes officer. "The name's Bentley, Sid Bentley. If you wouldn't mind giving me that card."

The officer nodded, pulled a card from his pocket, and scribbled on it.

"What are you doing?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"Giving this man a courtesy card. He caught Lamont—stopped him when he was running/away."

Sergeant Ackley was in a particularly expansive mood. "Here," he said, "I'll give him one, too."

Sid Bentley took the cards. He stared for a long, dubious moment at Lester Leith, then said: "Gentlemen, I thank you very much. It was a pleasure to help you. Good night."

A police car sirened its way to the curb. Sergeant Ackley loaded

his prisoners into the car, and they made a quick run to headquarters with Dixie Dormley, white-faced and determined, following in a taxicab.

Sergeant Ackley said to the desk sergeant: "Well, let's get the boys from the press in here. I've solved the Navin murder, recovered the ruby, and caught a hijacker red-handed."

Dixie Dormley said: "And he's been guilty of unnecessary brutality."

One of the reporters from the press room came sauntering in. "What you got, Sergeant?" he asked.

Sergeant Ackley said: "I've solved the Navin murder."

"Hot dog," the newspaperman said.

The desk sergeant said dubiously: "Sergeant, did you take a good look at this ruby?"

Sergeant Ackley said: "I don't have to. I had the thing all doped out. I knew where it was, and how to get it. That ruby is worth a fortune. There'll be a reward for that, and—"

"There won't be any reward for this," the desk sergeant said, "unless I'm making a big mistake. This is a nice piece of red glass. You see, I know something about gems, Sergeant. I was on the jewelry detail for—"

Sergeant Ackley's jaw sagged. "You mean that isn't a real ruby?" Lester Leith said to the desk sergeant: "If you'll permit me, I can explain. This was an imitation which I had made. It's rather a good imitation—it cost me fifty dollars. I gave it to a young man who wanted to be a detective to keep for me. His pocket was picked. Naturally, he was very much chagrined. I wanted to get the property returned, so I discreetly offered a reward. The property was returned earlier this evening. What I say can be established by absolute proof."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were riveted on the red stone. "You didn't get this from Lamont?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Lamont will tell you that I didn't."

Lamont said: "I've never seen that before in my life."

"Then where's the real ruby?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

Lamont took a deep breath. "I haven't the least idea."

"What were you running away for?"

"Probably because of the manner in which you tried to make your arrest," Lester Leith interposed. "You didn't tell him you were an officer. You simply yelled, 'Get him,' and your man started for him with—"

"No such thing!" Sergeant Ackley interrupted.

"That's exactly what happened," Dixie Dormley said indignantly.

The desk sergeant said to Lester Leith: "Why didn't you tell him this was an imitation?"

Dixie Dormley said: "He tried to, and Sergeant Ackley slapped him across the mouth."

Sergeant Ackley blinked his eyes rapidly, then said: "I didn't do any such thing. I didn't touch the man."

Dixie Dormley said: "I thought you'd try to lie out of it. I have the names of a dozen witnesses who feel the same way I do about police brutality, and will join me in making a complaint."

Ackley said savagely: "Give me the list of those witnesses."

Dixie Dormley threw back her head and laughed in his face.

The sergeant said: "You know how the chief feels about that, Sergeant."

Lester Leith said quietly: "I'd like to call up my valet. He can come down here and identify that imitation ruby. It's one which he had made."

The desk sergeant reached for the telephone, but Sergeant Ackley stopped him. "I happen to know there was an imitation ruby made," he said, "if you're sure this is imitation."

The desk sergeant said: "There's no doubt about it."

Sergeant Ackley fitted a key to the handcuffs, unlocked them, said to Lester Leith: "You're getting off lucky this time. I don't know how you did it."

Leith said, with dignity: "You simply went off halfcocked, Sergeant. I wouldn't have held it against you if you'd given me a chance to explain, but you struck me when I tried to tell you that the gem you had was an imitation, that it was my property, that I have a bill of sale for it."

The newspaper reporter scribbled gleefully. "Hot dog," he said, and scurried away toward the press room. A moment later he was back with a camera and a flash bulb. "Let me get a picture of this," he said. "Hold up that imitation gem."

Sergeant Ackley shouted: "You can't publish this!"

The flash of the bulb interrupted his protest.

Edward H. Beaver, the undercover man, was still up when Lester Leith latchkeyed the door of the apartment. "Hello, Scuttle," he said. "Up rather late, aren't you?"

"I was waiting for a phone call."

Leith raised his eyebrows. "Rather late for a phone call, isn't it, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. Have you seen Sergeant Ackley tonight, sir?"

"Have I seen him!" Leith said, with a smile. "I'll say I've seen him. You'll read all about it in the papers tomorrow, Scuttle. Do you know what happened? The sergeant arrested me for recovering my own property."

"Your own property, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle. That imitation ruby. I was rather attached to it, and Vare felt so chagrined about having lost it that I thought it would be worth a small reward to get it back."

"And you recovered it?"

"Oh, yes," Leith said. "I got it earlier in the evening. Sergeant Ackley found it in my pocket and jumped to the conclusion it was the real ruby."

"What did he do?" the spy asked.

Lester Leith grinned. "He covered himself with glory," he said. "He put on quite a show for a crowd of interested spectators, and then committed the crowning indiscretion of inviting them to read about it in the paper tomorrow morning. They'll read about it, all right. Poor Ackley!"

A slow smile twisted the spy's features. "The sergeant didn't give you anything for me, did he, sir?"

"For you, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, no. Why the devil would you be getting things from Sergeant Ackley?"

"You see, sir, I happened to run into the sergeant a day or so ago, and he borrowed my watch. He was going to return it. He—"

The phone rang and the spy jumped toward it with alacrity. "I'll answer it, sir," he said.

He picked up the receiver, said: "Hello . . . Yes . . . Oh, he did—" and then listened for almost a minute.

A slow flush spread over the spy's face. He said: "That wasn't the way I understood it. That wasn't the bet—" There was another interval during which the receiver made raucous, metallic sounds, then a bang at the other end of the line announced that the party had hung up.

The undercover man dropped the receiver back into place.

Lester Leith sighed. "Scuttle," he said, "I don't know what we're going to do about Sergeant Ackley. He's a frightful nuisance."

"Yes, sir," the spy said.

"And a very poor loser," Leith remarked.

"I'll say he's a poor loser," the spy blurted. "Any man who will take advantage of his official position as a superior to wriggle out of paying a debt—"

"Scuttle," Lester Leith interrupted, "what the devil are you talk-

ing about?"

"Oh, another matter, sir. Something else which happened to be on my mind."

Leith said: "Well, get it off your mind, Scuttle. Bring out that bottle of Scotch and a soda siphon. We'll have a quiet drink. Just the two of us."

Beaver had just finished with the drinks when a knock sounded at the door. "See who it is, Scuttle."

Dixie Dormley and Harry Vare stood on the threshold.

Leith, on his feet, ushered them into the room, seated the actress, indicated a chair for Vare, and said: "Two more highballs, Scuttle."

Vare said haltingly: "I'm sorry, Mr. Leith. The way the thing was put up to me, I couldn't have done any differently."

Leith dismissed the matter with a gesture.

Dixie Dormley said: "After you left, a Captain Carmichael came in. He seemed terribly upset, and was pretty angry at Sergeant Ackley. It seems that two of the people who had been standing there were friends of Captain Carmichael, and they telephoned in to him about the brutality of the police."

Leith smiled. "Is that so," he commented idly. "What happened?" Dixie Dormley said: "Well, Sergeant Ackley had just let Lamont go—figured he didn't have any case against him. Captain Carmichael listened to what Ackley had to report, and was furious. He issued an order to have Lamont picked up again, and a radio car got him within a dozen blocks of the police station.

"They brought him back and Carmichael went to work on him, and in no time had a confession out of him. It seems he'd agreed to open one of the steel shutters for some Hindu priests. They'd paid him for the job. Then he got the idea of doublecrossing them, opened the safe, lifted the ruby, and hid it.

"He had it with him tonight when he was arrested. He swore the plainclothesman must have taken it from his pocket when they were scuffling. The plainclothesman denied it, and then they thought of this man who had first grabbed Lamont.

"So then they figured he was the man they wanted, and it turned

out the police had not only let him go, but given him a couple of courtesy cards. Well, you should have heard Captain Carmichael! Such language!"

Leith turned to Vare.

"There you are, Vare," he said. "A complete education in the detection of crime by the case method. Just observe Sergeant Ackley, do the exact opposite of what he does, and you're bound to be a success."

And the police spy, resuming his mixing of the drinks, could be seen to nod, unconsciously but perceptibly.

THE HAND IS QUICKER THAN THE EYE

Lester Leith, sprawled in a chaise longue on the screened balcony of his apartment, read the newspaper account of the theft with considerable interest.

A few paces behind him, Edward H. Beaver, the police undercover man who had insinuated his way into Leith's service as a valet, made a great show of dusting; but his beady eyes were riveted on the slender, well-knit figure of the man whom police considered the most brilliant crime technician of the decade.

The newspaper account was somewhat vague. The theft had taken place at the residence of Charles Sansone, the well-known authority on Asiatic history, who had recently returned from an extended trip in the Orient. The victim of the theft had been one Katiska Shogiro, a Japanese gentleman who owned a pearl necklace of immense value. The clasp of the necklace was of that peculiar bright yellow gold which characterizes Chinese workmanship, and while undoubtedly the necklace bore a resemblance to a priceless museum piece which had vanished from the storeroom of the Forbidden City, Shogiro smilingly explained that the resemblance was purely superficial.

Sansone, it seemed, was interested in the necklace. It had even been intimated that he contemplated its purchase. In any event, Katiska Shogiro had been invited to the highly cosmopolitan dinner party at which Frank Thoms, the big game hunter, Peter Grier, the explorer, and Silman Shore, the expert trapshooter, were also present. Because Charles Sansone's secretary, Mah Foy, was Chinese, Sansone had tactfully given her a day and night off, although she usually supervised the details of his dinner parties, and was generally present in the capacity of hostess...

Beaver, the pseudo-valet, becoming more and more absorbed in watching the man upon whom he spied, slowed down his dusting operations until his hands barely moved.

Leith, looking up, said, "Something wrong, Scuttle?"

The valet resumed his duties with alacrity, replying, "No, sir."

It had long been a matter of great irritation to him that Leith refused to address him by the name of Beaver, but habitually referred to him as "Scuttle," a nickname bestowed because of a fancied resemblance in Leith's mind to a reincarnated pirate. Now the valet concealed his irritation by seizing the opportunity to discuss the theft of the necklace. He knew from experience that if he could turn Leith's razor-sharp mind to the problem of the theft, it was quite possible that Leith, with no more information than was given by the newspaper accounts, would spot the thief. Once that had been done, the spy knew that a series of baffling and seemingly unrelated incidents would then occur which would culminate in Leith urbanely walking off with the loot under such circumstances that the police would be just one jump behind. Later, one of Leith's charities would be enhanced by the exact amount which Leith had received for the sale of the loot, less 20 per cent which the police shrewdly suspected was retained by Leith as the costs of collection.

Beaver lived in anticipation of the moment when Leith's smoothworking mind would overlook a bet, and the police would not be that one jump behind. So far that had not happened. At times the police had been almost on Leith's heels, but they had never quite caught up.

"A most baffling crime, sir," the spy said.

"Baffling?" Leith asked.

"Yes, sir. The pearl necklace."

"Oh, that," Leith said. "I fail to see anything baffling about it, Scuttle. It's a run-of-the-mill crime. I suppose it would seem baffling to the untrained mind because of the mystery which seems to surround the manner in which Shogiro acquired the necklace in the first place. However, that's only background. The crime itself is quite simple."

"Simple, sir!" the valet exclaimed.

"Exactly," Leith said.

"Perhaps then," the spy said, in his best wheedling technique, "you can tell me who committed it."

Leith selected a cigarette and said quite calmly, "That's true, Scuttle."

"What's true, sir?"

"Perhaps I could tell you the identity of the thief."

"Yes, sir?" the spy asked eagerly.

Leith struck a match.

"I'm waiting, sir," the valet said.

"A most commendable habit," Leith said, "that of patience, Scuttle. I recommend it most highly. At times, I've noticed a tendency on your part to be impatient."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you said you were going to tell me the identity of the culprit."

Leith said, "Oh, no, Scuttle. There you go, misunderstanding me again. You merely mentioned that *perhaps* I could tell you the identity of the thief, and I admitted that *perhaps* I could."

The spy flushed, but he kept his voice under control. "Yes, sir. I appreciate the distinction. Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it," Leith said.

The spy tried another approach. "Of course, sir," he said, with a cunning gleam in his eye, "any man of ordinary intelligence could point out the *probable* criminal in five cases out of ten. The police, however, have a different problem. They have to *prove* that a man is guilty."

Leith said, almost musingly, "After all, Scuttle, why not? The crime has everything to challenge the imagination of the investigator: Oriental background, fabulous pearls, a mysterious disappearance, and—Yes, Scuttle, I will commission you to do it."

"To do what, sir?"

"To go through the newspapers and note every single fact about the crime."

The spy's eyes lit up. "Yes, sir. When shall I start?"

"Right now," Leith said. "And by the way, Scuttle . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"I notice that Mr. Sansone has a Chinese secretary."

"Yes, sir."

"Find out about her. Get a full description of the pearls. I think Mr. Shogiro stated they were the duplicate of a string which has been illustrated in some publication on the museum pieces of China. Find out whether Peter Grier speaks Chinese, and whether Frank Thoms, the big game hunter, intends to go to Alaska this fall for Kodiac grizzly. And, oh, yes, find out if Shogiro has given up his proposed trip to Europe. As I remember it, he intended to sail the middle of the month."

"Yes, sir."

"And get me the address of every manufacturer in the city who handles equipment for amateur magicians."

The spy blinked.

"And," Leith said, "I think that is all—for the moment."

Lester Leith strolled into the newspaper office with a want ad.

"Help Wanted—Female," he said to the young woman behind the counter. "Run this ad in a box so that it will attract considerable attention."

She read it through, then glanced quickly at Leith. "It will cost a lot," she explained.

"Quite all right," he assured her.

She counted the words, made a note of the total, and then looked at the hundred-dollar bill which Leith took from his pocket and slipped across the counter. She opened the cash drawer, made change, and handed him a receipt.

"I want the earliest possible publication," he said.

"Yes, sir."

She followed him with her eyes as he left the office, then hastily beckoned to the girl on her left. "Gosh, Mamie," she said, "don't you wish you were Chinese?"

"Shucks, no," the girl said, patting her hair. "Who was the swell, Gert?"

"Read it," Gertrude said, handing Leith's copy over to Mamie. "He wants a Chinese secretary who is young and free to travel. He wants someone who knows Chinese history and who has a college education. He offers to pay six hundred dollars a month and all traveling expenses... Think of working for a guy like him and getting six hundred bucks a month for it!"

Meanwhile, Leith took a taxi to one of the largest bookstores. "I want some of your best books," he said, "on legerdemain."

And while this was happening, Beaver sat closeted with Sergeant Ackley at police headquarters. Ackley worried the stump of a cold cigar as he listened, his forehead puckered into a prodigious frown.

When the undercover man had finished, Ackley said, "Listen, Beaver, if we could put this thing across, we could make a clean-up.

Shogiro has offered a reward of five thousand bucks and no questions asked."

The undercover man whistled.

Sergeant Ackley said, "I'll get you the file, and you can go over it. Don't let him get away on this, Beaver. This is the biggest thing we've ever tackled. If we could nail him, and at the same time get that necklace, we could kill two birds with one stone. Think of what you could do with twenty-five hundred bucks in cold, hard cash."

The undercover man sighed.

"Don't overlook Charles Sansone in this thing," Sergeant Ackley said. "The facts point to him as the slicker, although he's fired his Chinese secretary—a nice way of diverting suspicion from himself."

"Why?" Beaver asked. "That is, what reason does he give for firing her?"

"Seems she'd violated instructions. Sansone told her to clear out and not come back until after the dinner. He had his eye on that necklace—wanted to buy it from Shogiro. Shogiro wanted to sell it. They were doing a little trading on the price. Apparently, the necklace is a pip, in addition to which it was worn by the Empress Dowager of China and has a lot of history attached to it . . . By the way, what's all this stuff about the amateur magic?"

"Hanged if I know," Beaver said. "You know what he does when he starts working on a case. He gets a lot of goofy stuff together. Some of it's important, some of it isn't—but it all fits in some way."

"Well," Sergeant Ackley chuckled, "this is once he'll come a cropper. He hasn't any head start on us this time. We're in on the ground floor."

Lester Leith eyed the Chinese girl thoughtfully. Her skin was smooth as old ivory. The eyes were slightly slanted. She was in her late twenties, and her voice had that delicacy of expression which is indicative of a race which must have vocal cords so finely trained, and an ear so delicately receptive, as to distinguish any one of the eight tones in which a syllable of the Chinese language may be spoken.

She said, very casually, "There are not a great number of Chinese girls in this country who know both the Chinese written and spoken language, have first-hand experience with their native land, and possess a degree from a Western university."

"I daresay that is right."

Her eyes glittered in a swift survey of his face, but her face re-

mained blank. "One might almost have thought," she said, "that the advertisement was intended to single me out."

Leith said, "I hadn't thought of it that way, but anyone who did possess the rather unusual combination of qualifications could be pardoned for thinking so."

"Then you pardon me?"

"Yes."

There was the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes as she said, "Then I think so."

Leith laughed. "All right," he said. "Miss Foy, I acknowledge the guilt. To be perfectly frank with you, I read in the newspaper account of the theft of that necklace that you had been dismissed because of a violation of instructions."

"My dismissal," she said, "was unjust."

"What happened?"

"My employer suggested that because he was desirous of purchasing the necklace, and because Mr. Shogiro would be suspicious if one of my race was a guest at the dinner, that it would be well to absent myself, not only from the dinner, but from the house."

"You failed to do so?"

"I did exactly as he requested. Unfortunately, however, I discovered that I had lost some very valuable jade which my mother had given me. It was a pendant, and evidently the supporting ring had almost worn through. The pendant had caught on something, and all that was left was the chain."

"So you returned to the house?" Lester Leith asked.

"I did. I tried to return in such a way that no one would notice. But I failed."

"Did you find the jade?"

"Yes. It had caught on one of the drapes in my bedroom and had dropped to the floor."

"What sort of chap is Sansone?" Leith asked.

She said, very calmly, "I'm afraid I do not understand. Is it not the purpose to ask the former employer concerning the character of the employee, rather than to to ask the employee about the character of her former employer?"

Leith said, "Doubtless that is the custom, but I asked the question for a very particular purpose."

"He is a gentleman," Mah Foy said.

Leith drummed with the tips of his fingers on the table. "If perhaps he had thought that a theft would occur while Shogiro was at his

house, and wished to protect you, he might have been been shrewd and considerate enough to suggest that you arrange a perfect alibi for yourself."

He saw quick flashing interest in her eyes.

"But how could he have anticipated that a theft would occur while Shogiro was under his roof?"

Lester Leith brushed the question aside. "That, of course, is something for the police to consider. It is just a thought."

"Are you then a detective?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"And do you actually have need for a secretary, Mr. Leith, or did

you wish to interrogate me?"

"Both," Leith said. "If you would like the job, you're hired. The salary is six hundred a month. You will have your traveling expenses taken care of, and, if necessary, we can consider a reasonable wardrobe a part of your traveling expenses."

"You intend to travel?"

"Yes."

"May I ask where?"

"To the Hawaiian Islands."

She raised her eyebrows. "To Honolulu?"

"Yes."

"That will be delightful," she said. "I am considered an expert typist. I can take rapid dictation in shorthand, and I feel certain that I could do your work. When do you wish me to start?"

"At once."

"You mean now—this instant?"

"Yes."

She said, "Very well. May I see the typewriter please?"

Leith said, "There won't be any typing for the present, Miss Foy."

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"Wait here for my return."

"So I may make appointments?"

"Yes," Leith said, getting to his feet. "I have a valet who should be back at any moment. His name is Beaver. I call him Scuttle. He has been with me for some time, and I have the greatest confidence in his loyalty and integrity."

"But one should expect that of all employees."

"Exactly," Leith said, "but I can double it in the case of Scuttle. I have absolutely no secrets from him."

"That is very nice."

Leith said, "He will probably ask you questions about what you are doing here and what was said in this interview."

She said, "My race considers that it is the province of the servant to work, of the master to ask questions."

"Well, Scuttle has his own ideas," Leith said, with something of a twinkle in his eyes, "and I would be particularly happy if you would answer all his questions quite truthfully, because, you see, if you didn't, he might think I had cautioned you not to, and I wouldn't want to hurt him for the world."

"Very well," she said.

"And," Leith said, "I really feel, Miss Foy, that you shouldn't hold any grudge against Mr. Sansone. It may well have been that he asked you to leave for your own protection. As I get the story from the newspapers, Mr. Shogiro called on him the day before the dinner at which the necklace was stolen. At that time, Sansone inspected the necklace. The next evening Shogiro came to dinner and brought the necklace with him. It was in a carved ivory jewel case which Shogiro carried in the inside pocket of his coat. After dinner, at the request of Mr. Sansone, he produced the necklace so that Mr. Sansone's guests could see it. At that time, the necklace was found to be an imitation. The assumption, of course, is that a substitution had been made sometime during the evening. But isn't it quite possible that Mr. Sansone had perhaps recognized the necklace as an imitation when he first saw it?"

"In that case, why did he not tell Mr. Shogiro?"

"Because," Leith said, "he wasn't certain. You'll note that the dinner was for men only—men who knew something about pearls and about China. In fact, I believe it was one of the guests who observed that the pearls were imitation."

"So I understand," she said.

Leith abruptly got to his feet. "That," he said, "is all, Miss Foy. You are hired. Your salary starts at once. If anyone should appear and ask for me, I have gone out and will return in an hour."

Leith opened the door of his apartment and stood to one side. A taxi driver, loaded with parcels, staggered into the room.

"Where do you want these put, boss?"

"Any place," Leith said. "My man will put them away. Here, Scuttle, give a hand."

The undercover man, who had been engaged in low-voiced conversation with Mah Foy, jumped forward to help the cab driver.

Leith said, "There's more in the cab, Scuttle. If you will go back with the driver, you can bring the other parcels up."

When the valet and the cab driver had gone, Mah Foy said, in her musical voice, "May I assist you in opening the packages and putting them away, Mr. Leith?"

"Not yet," Leith said. "We'll await Scuttle's return. Scuttle will be interested to know what's in the packages. He's very curious, in case you hadn't noticed."

Mah Foy said, "I have noticed."

"Questions?" Leith asked.

"Many questions."

Leith said, "I trust that you remembered to answer them fully." "Quite fully," she said.

Leith grinned. "We'll stack these bundles to one side," he said.

Together they moved the packages so that the doorway was cleared.

Even the Chinese girl showed curiosity as the undercover man and the cab driver returned with another load of packages.

"That all?" Leith asked.

"That's all, sir," the cab driver said.

When the cab driver had left, Leith closed the door and surveyed the array of packages. "Very well, Scuttle," he said, "you may open them."

Eagerly the undercover man produced a knife and started cutting cords.

Leith said, "Be careful, Scuttle. Many of those things are fragile." "Yes, sir," the undercover man said.

He pulled back the heavy, brown wrapping paper, lifted the lid off a box, and brought out a glass bowl. "What's this?" he asked.

"A goldfish bowl," Leith said. "Not an ordinary goldfish bowl, of course, but one that has valuable properties."

"I don't see anything special, sir."

Leith said, "You'll observe, Scuttle, that there's a circular partition in that bowl. When it is filled with water, this circular partition acts as a huge magnifying glass. Place that in front of an audience, and a small section of the bowl directly in back of it is magnified so that it looks as though the whole bowl is filled with water in which goldfish are swimming. As a matter of fact, only a small portion of the bowl contains water or goldfish."

The undercover man straightened. "The audience?"

"Exactly," Lester Leith said calmly.

Scuttle appeared slightly bewildered.

"But I don't see what an audience has to do with it, if you don't mind my saying so, sir?"

Leith said, "We are going in for prestidigitation, legerdemain, sleight of hand, optical illusions, parlor magic, and general hocuspocus, Scuttle."

"You mean you're going to take that up as an occupation, sir?"

"Tut, tut," Leith said. "You should know me better. I prefer to retain my amateur standing. Well, open the others, Scuttle."

The undercover man opened a flat, heavy package. "What's this? It looks like an ordinary double slate like those used in school."

"You shouldn't say that, Scuttle," Leith said. "It dates you. However, you are quite right. Observe, Scuttle, how easy it is to communicate with the unseen forces which guard our lives. Ah, there it is-the sponge."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, producing the sponge from a corner of the

box.

"Now, Scuttle, if you will just step into the kitchen and dampen this sponge, you can wipe off both sides of the slate. There should be some slate pencils—ah, here they are."

Leith took out a package of slate pencils.

The undercover man, holding the sponge in his hand, stepped into the kitchenette. Leith glanced across at Mah Foy, the Chinese girl. and winked at her.

She watched him with an impassive countenance on which there was not the slightest flicker of expression, but just as the valet returned with the moistened sponge, she lowered her own right lid, although her face remained as calmly placid as though it were carved from old ivory.

"Now then," Leith said, "if you'll just take this slate, Scuttle, and clean it with the wet sponge. Make absolutely certain that there is no writing on it."

"Yes, sir," the valet said, wiping off the surfaces of the slate.

"Now take it into the bathroom, get a towel, and dry it carefully." Beaver produced a towel and carefully dried the slate.

"Now," Leith said, "I don't want you to let that slate out of your sight, Scuttle. First, we'll put a piece of pencil between the leaves of the slate. Hold it open, Scuttle, just so. That's right. Now we'll close it, and you might take it over and place it on that table in the far corner of the room, being careful not to take your eyes from it for even a moment."

The valet did as he was instructed.

"Now, Scuttle, watch closely. See if you can see the spirits."

"The spirits, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle, the . . . There they are!"

A faint squeaking noise became distinctly audible.

"Good heavens, sir!" the valet exclaimed. "Is that noise coming from—from the slate?"

"From the slate, Scuttle."

Beaver's eyes widened.

"And now, Scuttle," Leith said, as the noise ceased, "I wouldn't be surprised if we had a message from the unseen world."

"But surely, sir, you're fooling."

"Not at all, Scuttle. Just pick up the slate and bring it to me. Ah, that's right."

Leith took the slate from the valet. Only the Chinese girl noticed the manner in which he fumbled with the catch as he opened the double slate.

A message, written in a distinctly feminine hand, appeared across the inner surface of the slate. It read: First warning. Be very careful, Beaver, not to tell any falsehoods after you have started for Honolulu. Ruth.

The spy was visibly shaken. "Good heavens!" he said.

Leith frowned. "What the devil are they talking about, Scuttle?" "Who?" the spy asked.

"The spirits. And what is all this about a trip to Honolulu?"

"I assure you, sir, I don't know."

"And who is Ruth? Someone perhaps who has gone to the other shore, Scuttle?"

"The other shore, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle. I-"

"Good grief!" the valet suddenly exclaimed, staring at Leith with eyes which seemed about to bulge from their sockets.

"What is it, Scuttle?"

"Ruth!" Beaver exclaimed. "My wife!"

"Your wife, Scuttle? I didn't know you were married."

"It was some time ago, sir. I was married for two years. But she was—she was killed in an auto accident."

Leith said, closing the slate as though that disposed of the matter, "Undoubtedly, Scuttle, the message is from your departed wife who wishes to warn you against the result of any falsehood should you take a trip to Honolulu."

Beaver turned pale. "It's uncanny."

"Oh, quite," Leith said airily, dismissing the subject. "But we can't neglect these other boxes, Scuttle."

The spy took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. "If it's all the same to you, sir," he said, "I'd like to postpone the rest of it for a while. I'm feeling shaky, sir. I—"

Leith said, "That's all right, Scuttle. You'd better have a drink. Perhaps Miss Foy will join us."

The Chinese girl shook her head.

"Well," Leith said, "a couple of Scotch and sodas, Scuttle—or perhaps you'd prefer to make yours a double brandy?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

When the valet had filled the glasses, Leith sat on the arm of a chair, casually sipping his Scotch and soda. "Do you know, Scuttle," he said, "there's one other thing I didn't get."

"What's that, sir?"

"A stooge."

"But I don't understand."

"Did you ever see a magician on the stage?"

"Yes, sir, a couple of times."

"Then you've noticed that a magician is invariably accompanied by a young stage assistant, a very beautiful young woman who is easy on the eye and whose skirts are always very short?"

"Yes, sir, I do remember that."

Scuttle was puzzled.

"Exactly, Scuttle," Leith said. "That's the first principle of stage magic—divided attention. The idea is that the hand is quicker than the eye, but the eye can't watch the hand when it's stealing glances at a pair of beautiful legs. So what we need, Scuttle, is a girl with beautiful legs."

"Yes, sir. Do you wish me to get you one, sir?"

"No, Scuttle, I will select my own stooge."

And Lester Leith abruptly left the apartment.

The man who ran the theatrical employment agency was frankly skeptical.

"Do I understand," he said, "that you wish to hire a young woman who has been thrown out of employment by the recent drive against burlesque shows?"

"That's exactly it," Leith said. "I want a young woman who is beautiful, who is accustomed to the public admiration of her curves, and who has just about given up hope."

The agent said, "You might try Ora Sanders. That poor kid certainly has had a tough time. Last Friday her roommate tried to commit suicide. Ora hocked everything she had except the clothes she stood in, and kicked through with every last cent to help the kid out."

"Where," Leith asked, "can I find Miss Sanders?"

"I'll reach her for you. What's the nature of the employment?"

Leith coughed deprecatingly. "I'm an amateur magician," he said. "I want a young woman who can assist me."

"You can't go wrong on Ora," the agent said. "Let me give her a ring."

"If possible," Leith said, "I'd prefer to see her in her room rather than here in the office, and I'd like to see her right away."

The agent dialed a number, said, "Miss Sanders, please," and then, after a moment, "I'm sending a Mr. Leith to discuss employment at fifty dollars a week. Is that satisfactory? ... Fine ... Yes. almost at once."

He hung up, and said to Leith, "She'll be glad to see you. Here's her address."

Leith found Ora Sanders to be a blonde with light blue eyes that were waging a losing battle with the fine wrinkles of worry, a determined chin, and smiling lips. Her small, poorly lighted room was well covered with autographed theatrical pictures.

Leith introduced himself.

"Manna from heaven!" she exclaimed. "Come on in."

"I am in somewhat of a hurry," Leith explained.

"In that event, you can dispense with telling me that times are hard, that there aren't many jobs available, and I'll be fortunate to get work with you; and I'll dispense with telling you that times. aren't hard for me, that I've had two offers lately, but that neither is just what I want, so that I might consider something good."

Leith smiled. "The salary is fifty dollars a week."

"My agent told me that."

"Your duties," Lester said, "will be highly personal."

"Oh-oh!" she remarked.

"I'm an amateur magician," Leith went on. "I have noticed that professional magicians usually have a young woman with beautiful legs appear on the stage to hand them their props."

She stepped back, placed her ankles together, and raised her skirt. "How are my legs?" she asked.

"Perfect," Leith said. "I can't imagine anyone in the audience

keeping his mind on the disappearing watch with scenery like that to look at."

She dropped her skirts and with them her manner of easy banter. "Listen," she said, "I simply have to get a job. This isn't the sort of work I've been doing. I'm not certain that it's the kind I'd like to do, but if you're willing to take a chance on me, I'm willing to take a chance on you."

Leith opened his wallet and took out one hundred dollars. "Two weeks' salary," he explained. "And here's an extra hundred."

"An extra hundred," she echoed.

He nodded. "I want you to get some new clothes for your act. Brevity is the soul of wit, and I think you understand what is required."

He reached once more into his wallet and took out three hundreddollar bills. "Here is some expense money. Get a wardrobe."

"Now, wait a minute," she said. "I'm not going to pinch myself because I don't want to wake up, but let's not go overboard."

Leith said, "It's quite all right. You're going to take a trip on a boat. You'll need a couple of dinner gowns, a sports outfit, and accessories."

She said again, "Now, wait a minute. What do you want in return for all this?" And her eyes stared at Lester Leith with disconcerting frankness.

"Loyalty," Leith said. "A willingness to follow instructions."

She said, "Listen, I'm no tin angel, but-"

Leith smiled, put his wallet away, and said, "I think we understand each other, Miss Sanders. If you'll get out and do your shopping, I'll telephone instructions later."

The undercover man sat across the table from Sergeant Ackley and said, "Well, Sergeant, it's all off."

"What is?" Ackley asked.

"The whole thing," Beaver said. "It's just a runaround. He's either gone nuts, or else he's become suspicious and is taking us for a ride."

"Nonsense," Sergeant Ackley said, "not with a priceless string of matched pearls with a historical value which makes it a collector's item."

"All right, then," Beaver said, "suppose you figure it out."

Sergeant Ackley said, "That's what I'm here for, Beaver. You do the leg work. I furnish the brain that directs your energies. You're the contractor. I'm the architect."

"All right, then," the undercover man said, "figure this out. He hires Charles Sansone's Chinese secretary. He hires a girl with the prettiest figure you've ever seen. He gets a thousand dollars' worth of parlor magic stuff, and announces he's taking the whole kit and kaboodle to Honolulu."

"To Honolulu?" Sergeant Ackley exclaimed. Then a look of smug satisfaction came over Ackley's countenance. "The trouble with you, Beaver, is that you haven't a deductive mind. You're observant and conscientious, but you're dealing with a man who has a chain-lightning brain, and you can't think fast enough to put two and two together."

"Meaning," Beaver said, "that you have a highly trained mind."

"Naturally," Sergeant Ackley said modestly, "or I wouldn't be here."

"All right," Beaver said, "you tell me then. What's the answer?"

Sergeant Ackley picked up the morning paper, opened it to an inside page, and said, "Get a load of this. The international competition of skeet shooters is scheduled to take place in Honolulu two weeks from today. Silman Shore, a noted trap-shooter who has already broken several records, expects to compete. Shore's photo is shown above."

Beaver's face showed amazed comprehension. "By gosh," he said, "it may make sense at that!"

"Of course it makes sense," Sergeant Ackley said. "Now, tell me exactly what's been going on."

Beaver said, "He wanted to know all about how the crime was committed. I told him. Most of it he could get from the newspapers anyway, and he's a shark at deducing things from what he reads in the papers."

"Exactly what did you tell him?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"I told him about Shogiro passing the necklace around for examination. Sansone pretended it was a social party. As a matter of fact, every one of the men there knows something about gems—or about Chinese history. Grier had seen the necklace when he was in the Forbidden City five years ago, and remembered it."

"Go on."

"Well, he was interested in finding out how the theft took place. I told him all we knew, that the necklace was shown around, that Grier was the last to look at it. He passed it to Sansone who had already looked at it. Sansone passed it back to Shogiro. Then, after a while, Sansone announced that he was intending to buy the neck-

lace and asked Shore if he had noticed the workmanship of the catch. Shore said he'd paid more attention to the pearls than to the catch, and Shogiro obligingly took the ivory jewel case out of his pocket and handed it to Shore. Shore opened it, picked up the necklace, turned toward the light, and then said, 'By George, this thing is counterfeit!' And then, of course, all hell broke loose.

"Well, Leith asked me to look up all the people who were there. I found out that Grier knows a lot about China. I found out that Charles Sansone is a well-known amateur magician. I found out that Thoms, the big game hunter, is going to Alaska—"

"Is he?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"He is," Beaver said.

"Well," Sergeant Ackley said, "as I see the situation, we have three suspects. Grier could very well have substituted necklaces when he handed the necklace to Sansone. Grier had already seen the necklace, knew exactly what it looked like, and could have had an imitation prepared.

"Sansone could have done it. He'd seen the necklace a couple of days before and he could have had an imitation ready. He's pretty good at sleight of hand. We can't leave Silman Shore out—he was the one to discover that it was an imitation."

"And don't overlook the fact that this Shogiro may be pulling a fast one," Beaver said.

"I don't think so," Sergeant Ackley observed. "He had nothing to gain."

"Well," Beaver said, "Leith was very much interested in finding out where Shogiro was going."

"And you found out?"

"Yes. Shogiro's canceling the trip he planned to Europe and is returning to Japan."

Sergeant Ackley's brows furrowed. "By way of Honolulu?" he asked.

"What do you think?" the undercover man replied.

The giant liner *Monterey* sent the long blast of a booming whistle echoing over the Los Angeles harbor. On the pier below, thousands of hysterical, waving people shouted farewells to the passengers who lined the decks. Streamers of colored paper, stretching from ship to shore, fluttered in the vagrant night breeze. The air was filled with shouts and laughter.

Then a dark strip of water appeared between the pier and the

white sides of the big ship. A surge of white water churned up from the stern. The big liner, graceful as a yacht, throbbed into motion, and the sleek white sides began to glide along the pier.

Lester Leith said to Ora Sanders, "Well, here we are, on our way—the start of adventure."

She looked up at him with bright eyes. "To think that I would ever have an experience like this," she breathed. "Oh, it's wonderful, simply wonderful!"

Leith moved over to rest his elbows on the teakwood rail. He glanced at Mah Foy standing motionless, the breeze swirling her skirts into gentle motion, her face utterly without expression.

Leith caught sight of the huge figure of Beaver towering above the other passengers. He motioned to him, and the valet joined him.

"You've looked over the passenger list, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who's aboard of those at the dinner party when the necklace disappeared?"

"Shogiro," the undercover man said, "Mah Foy, Charles Sansone, and Silman Shore."

"Sansone?" Lester Leith exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"What's he doing aboard?"

"Apparently just taking a trip to the Islands."

Leith frowned. "Seen anyone else you know, Scuttle?"

"No, sir."

"Who's your cabin mate?"

The undercover man frowned.

"An old gentleman inclined to seasickness, I understand, and something of an invalid, sir. He'll probably be a nuisance. He asked me particularly to entertain my friends outside the cabin. He expects to spend most of the time in bed."

"Most annoying," Leith said. "Too bad you didn't get a more agreeable companion."

"Yes, sir," the valet said, "but I'm quite certain the trip will be very enjoyable. Is there anything you wish, sir? I've laid your clothes out and—"

"No, Scuttle. That will be all for tonight. Take life easy and enjoy yourself. I'm dog tired and am going to turn in."

Leith waved to Ora Sanders. Her face showed disappointment. She moved swiftly to his side and said, "Aren't you going to watch the Mainland out of sight? Have you no romance?"

He whispered, "I'm setting a trap. Meet me on the boat deck in fifteen minutes."

Leith said good night to Mah Foy and started in the direction of his cabin, but detoured to the boat deck where Ora Sanders found him a quarter of an hour later.

Leith said, "I want to be where I can see without being seen. Would you consider the duties of your employment too onerous if you sat over here in the shadow of the lifeboat and went into what is technically known as a huddle?"

She laughed. "I'd have been disappointed to think that I was starting on a trip to the Hawaiian Islands unhuddled," she said.

They sat close together in the shadow, talking in low tones. The couples who promenaded past them grew fewer in number as the ship swung out into the Pacific and the bow began to sway gently to the surge of the incoming swell.

Suddenly Leith exerted pressure on her arm. Ora Sanders followed the direction of his glance.

Beaver, accompanied by a stocky, bull-necked, broad-shouldered man, was promenading past. They heard him say, "It's okay now, Sarge, I told him you were an old invalid and to keep out of our cabin."

They walked past.

"Who was that?" Ora Sanders asked.

Leith smiled. "That," he said, "was Sergeant Arthur Ackley of the Metropolitan Police Force. I don't wish him any bad luck, but I hope he is highly susceptible to seasickness."

On the second day out, Mah Foy said to Lester Leith, "I haven't any definite idea of what you had in mind when you employed me. Certainly it wasn't to work."

Leith, sprawled in a deck chair and watching the intense blue waters of a semitropic ocean, smiled and said, "I am a man of extremes. When I work, I work long hours. When I loaf, I loaf long hours."

"So it would seem. Did you know that Mr. Sansone was going to be on this boat?"

"Frankly," Leith said, "I did not. I'm sorry if his presence causes you any embarrassment."

"It doesn't," she said, "only he was surprised at seeing me here."

"I can understand that."

"Did you know that Katiska Shogiro was going to be a passenger?" "I suspected that he might go as far as Honolulu."

"On this ship?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that Mr. Shore was going to be a passenger?"

"Yes," Leith said. "I knew that in advance."

She remained silent for several minutes, then she said, "If you have any work for me, please call."

"Wait a minute," Leith said as she arose from the deck chair. "I have one thing to ask of you."

"What is that, Mr. Leith?"

"Don't do anything rash. Promise me that you won't—at least until we are in Honolulu."

"Why?" she asked. "What made you think I contemplated doing anything you might describe as rash?"

"I have my reasons," Leith said.

She laughed. "My race has a proverb. 'Stirring the water does not help it to boil.' "

"A very good proverb," Leith said, "although I don't subscribe to it."

"You don't?"

"No," he said. "Stirring the water may not help it to boil, but it has other advantages."

"What are they?"

"Oh, for one thing," Leith said, "it scrambles the contents of the pot, and makes it difficult for an observer to know that the primary purpose of putting the pot on the stove was to get the water to boil."

"Are you, by any chance, referring to the mysterious cabin mate who takes surreptitious midnight strolls with your valet?"

"Oh," Leith said, "you know about that?"

She said, "In my position, I try to know everything."

"And thought that you should tell me about it?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," Leith said, "for your loyalty."

She met his eyes. "There is one other thing. I was commissioned by my government to recover that necklace, sell it, and bring the proceeds back to China."

"Thanks for telling me," Leith said. "I surmised it."

Leith was reading a book when Ora Sanders, wearing a shortskirted sports outfit, shook off a group of admirers to drop into the empty deck chair beside him. "When," she asked, "do we do sleight of hand?"

"Tonight," Leith said. "An impromptu entertainment by passengers. I have agreed to do a turn."

"That's fine," she said.

"You will, of course, wear your stage costume."

"I was hoping for that."

"Hoping?" he asked.

"Yes," she laughed. "So many of the male passengers have expressed a desire to see more of me."

"There is always the swimming tank," Leith suggested.

"I thought it might be better not to give them a preview."

"Very wise," he said. "By the way, have you met the captain?"

"Yes," she said.

"Think you could turn loose the battery of your eyes on him and make a suggestion?"

She nodded.

"At two o'clock tomorrow afternoon," Leith said, "I notice a skeet shoot is scheduled. I think it would be an excellent idea to advise the captain that we have aboard, in the person of Mr. Silman Shore. a trapshooter of nationwide reputation. It would be very appropriate if Mr. Shore should give a little exhibition for the benefit of the passengers. He—" He broke off at the expression on her face. "What is it?"

"How many people do you have making suggestions?" she asked. "Why?"

"That suggestion," she said, "was communicated to the captain this morning, shortly after the skeet shoot was noticed on the bulletin board."

"Who suggested it to him?"

"A Japanese by the name of Shogiro, a very interesting gentleman who has spent much of his time trying to cultivate my acquaintance."

Leith considered the statement in thoughtful silence. At length, he said, "Proof that great minds run in the same channels."

"Tell me," she said, "did my announcement distress you?"

"Not distress me," Leith said, "but it does give me food for thought—food which must be carefully chewed lest it give me mental indigestion."

She slid out of the chair with her sports skirt sliding up the wellshaped legs. "Okay," she said, "I'll run along before you get a mental tummyache."

"Don't do that again," Leith said.

"What?"

"Distract my attention," he said. "Remember that your province is to distract the attention of the audience."

"And I can't practice on you a little bit?"

"Well," Leith said judicially, "just a little—a very little bit."

Half an hour later, Katiska Shogiro dropped casually into the deck chair next to Lester Leith's. After a moment, he said in his very polite manner, "Excussse pleassse, but would it be interrupting your honorable meditations unduly if I humbly ask for match?"

"Not in the least," Leith said, and handed over a packet of

matches.

Shogiro lit his cigarette. "Passengers," he said conversationally, "have explain that very skillful magician is aboard contained in person of honorable you. Is possible perhaps that attentive student may look forward to exhibition tonight?"

Leith said, "I would hardly commend my amateurish attempts to the observation of an interested student. You know something of sleight of hand?"

Shogiro laughed. "Only very small ability," he said, "but large interest."

Leith said, "The idea of magic is to furnish entertainment. To a student of the art, the tricks will prove very transparent. I trust that you will remember that explanation destroys the mystery."

"Oh, quite," Shogiro said.

"I trust that I can count upon your silent cooperation?"

"Even clam," Shogiro explained, "is like parrot compared with Japanese contemplation of magic performed by good friend who gives matches to humble and unworthy student."

Lester Leith's face showed relief.

"You are perhaps of long-time proficiency?" Shogiro asked.

"No," Leith said. "My performance makes up in equipment that which it lacks in skill."

"Equipment?" Shogiro asked.

"Equipment for misdirecting attention," Leith said. "As a student, you will realize that the success of all magic lies in misdirecting the attention of the observer."

"Oh, quite," Shogiro said.

"Therefore," Leith said, "I have sought to avail myself of the greatest attention distracter known to science."

"Referring to which?"

"The pulchritude of feminine curves," Leith said. "Miss Sanders has consented to act as my accomplice."

"Very estimable distraction," Shogiro said.

"I trust it will prove quite sufficient."

"Confidence indeed is not misplaced," Shogiro remarked, arising abruptly from the chair. "And now humble student begs permission to retire and leave honorable master in contemplation of mystifying trickery to be performed in evening. Thanking you very much."

"Not at all," Leith said, and Shogiro walked rapidly down the deck, his manner that of a man who is embarking upon a very

definite mission.

Entertainment that night was in the hands of the passengers who contributed various forms of diversion. A dance team headed for Australia put on a tap dance, an artistic waltz, and a variation of the rumba. A poetess whose work had been published in some of the national magazines recited her favorite poem. A pianist played a selection from the classics, followed by some comedy jazz and a ragtime interpretation of one of the more familiar tunes of the Gay Nineties.

Beaver slipped through a rear door and took a seat in the back of the social hall. A moment later he signaled, and Sergeant Ackley, making himself as inconspicuous as possible, slipped into the adjoining chair and slumped down so as to make himself less noticeable. "Watch him, Beaver," he whispered. "He's going to pull something with this sleight-of-hand business."

Up in the front row, Mah Foy was separated only by two chairs from Katiska Shogiro, who sat perfectly still, a smile of fixed politeness frozen on his face.

A couple of stewards started bringing in various pieces of equipment. The purser, who acted as master of ceremonies, said, "We have with us tonight a man who can do tricks that would make masters envious. These are no ordinary sleight-of-hand tricks. These optical illusions represent the latest achievements of science. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Mr. Lester Leith."

Leith came forward and bowed. There was polite applause.

He said, "May I have your indulgence for a moment, please?" and walked down to where Mah Foy was seated.

"Shortly after the performance starts," he whispered in the ear of the Chinese girl, "a man who was at that dinner is going to get

up and leave the room. I want you to follow him and later tell me where he goes and what he does."

Mah Foy nodded.

Leith stepped back to the lighted circle and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, let me present my assistant, Miss Ora Sanders."

Ora, attired in a robe which covered her from neck to ankles, came forward and bowed. There was polite applause. She slipped off the robe and stood before the audience, garbed in black and white; a low-cut black blouse with white trimmings, a very short black skirt, a small white lace apron, and high black stockings.

The applause hesitated for a moment, then burst out anew. When the applause had subsided, Lester Leith said, "I'm going to ask your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen. Despite the comments of the purser, I feel that my performance may fall far short of his glowing description. However, I will do my best."

The purser said, "What's the idea of the apology? You told me this afternoon you were the best in the west."

There was a roar of laughter.

Leith said, "A man always exaggerates his qualifications to get the job. No hard feelings."

He advanced and shook hands with the purser. Suddenly he said, "Wait a minute. You don't want this," and took an egg from the purser's side coat pocket. "And what's this? Tut, tut. You shouldn't be carrying a black widow spider around on your sleeve!"

With a startled exclamation the purser jumped back and brushed at his arm. The spider dropped to the floor and lay with its rubber legs quivering.

Leith said, "Tut, tut. Having killed my pet, you should at least give him a decent burial. Here, take this little casket. Put him in that."

He handed the purser a small box. The purser bent forward, and Leith signaled to Ora Sanders, who handed him a loaded slapstick.

Just as the purser picked up the spider, the slapstick connected with that portion of his trousers which stretched tight in the stooping process. The impact set off the blank cartridge which had been imbedded in the slapstick, and the purser's reactions were all that the gleeful audience could have anticipated.

When the discomfited purser had retired, Leith nodded to Ora Sanders. She brought forward a table, and, opening a box, took out a goldfish bowl, in which the audience could plainly see goldfish swimming around.

Leith looked around the audience, then singled out Silman Shore. "Mr. Shore," he called.

"What is it?"

"You're an expert hunter, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe to the audience what you see in this bowl?"

"Goldfish," Shore said.

Leith said, "Tut, tut. You need to have your eyes examined." He reached in the goldfish bowl and pulled out a live, kicking rabbit, and, thereafter, while the audience applauded, he took out object after object from the bowl which apparently contained only live goldfish swimming about in water.

"Thank you, Mr. Shore," Leith said, "for your cooperation. After all, you know, it adds to our amusement when we see our fellow travelers taking part. Mr. Shogiro, might I ask you to step forward please."

"It is pleasure," Shogiro said.

Leith said, "I noticed that you seemed rather hungry in the dining room tonight. Apparently, you're a man with a large appetite . . . Ah, yes, I thought so. Turn around please."

Shogiro turned around, and Lester Leith reached down the back of his coat to pull out a bunch of celery which he held up to the audience, then tossed to Ora Sanders.

"Now wait a minute," he said as Shogiro, smiling politely, started back toward his seat. "What's that you have in your pocket?"

Shogiro followed the direction of Leith's eyes, and said, "Excusse pleasse. That is handkerchief for wiping eyes which have tears of laughter caused by amusement at honorable act."

There was just a trace of sarcasm in what he said, although his manner was that of smiling politeness. The audience applauded, and waited for Leith's comeback.

Leith reached out to take the corner of the silk handkerchief in his thumb and forefinger. He started pulling it out an inch or two at a time. "Very nice handkerchief," he said, "but what is this?"

Shogiro, smiling broadly, watched Lester Leith pull out yards and vards of silk ribbon and handkerchiefs. When he had finished he tossed the ball of silk to Ora Sanders.

Shogiro, standing very still, said, "Honorable gentleman have removed everything from pocket?"

"I certainly hope so," Leith said.

"Are sure is not more?" Shogiro asked.

The audience, sensing that the Japanese was trying to turn the tables on Leith, leaned forward in their seats.

"Well," Leith said, "if there's anything left in that pocket, Mr. Shogiro, you may keep it."

The audience laughed at the sally, but the laughter changed into roars as Shogiro, reaching into the pocket, pulled out what apparently was a human finger. He held it up and bent it double, showing that it was made of colored rubber. He inserted it between the fingers of his own hand, moved his hand rapidly, and the finger had vanished.

"Excusse pleasse," Shogiro said, "but in my country when honorable gentleman perform trick with false finger, unwinding yards of silk ribbon stored therein, is always customary to remove empty finger after trick is completed."

Shogiro turned and started toward the front row once more, but Leith again called him back. This time there was an ominous glitter in the eyes of the Japanese, although his lips continued to frame a polite smile.

"Anyone who turns the tables on me that well," Leith said, "is entitled to a reward. Now let me see. What can I give you? . . . I guess food would be the best. How about it, Miss Sanders? Can we cook up a little food for Mr. Shogiro?"

"Oh, I think so," she said.

Leith said, "Well, we might at least fry him an egg."

"We haven't any more eggs," Miss Sanders said.

"That's too bad," Leith said, "but—what's this?... Oh, yes, our friend, Shogiro, seems to have something else up his sleeve."

Leith picked up Shogiro's forearm, held his coat by the cuff, and shook it gently. Two eggs rolled out.

Leith, juggling the eggs in his hand, said, "That's fine. Now if we had a frying pan. Has anyone in the audience a frying pan?"

In the silence which followed, one of the stewards, who had been coached in the part, called out, "Why don't you look in the fishbowl?"

"An excellent idea," Leith said.

He walked over to the fishbowl, still holding the eggs, reached down, apparently plunging his hand into the water, and brought out a frying pan without in any way disturbing the fish.

"Now," he said, "we're ready. If you'll hold a match for us, Miss Sanders . . ."

He broke both eggs into the frying pan, tossed the shells to one side, held the frying pan over a match which Ora Sanders lighted,

shook the pan, and then approached the Japanese. "Here you are," he said.

Sergeant Ackley, in the back row, said to Beaver, "Watch him like a hawk, Beaver. He's getting ready to pull something. He's worked the buildup. Now, he's after blood."

Lester Leith, with the frying pan held rather high so that the Japanese could not see its interior, said, "A plate, please, Miss Sanders."

Ora Sanders picked up a plate from a table, started toward Leith, and stumbled. The plate slipped from her hands, fell to the floor, and broke into two pieces.

For a moment there was a gasp from the audience, but it was quickly apparent that Ora Sanders's fall had been far too gracefully done to be accidental. She got to her feet, smiled, then stared ruefully at a run in her stocking.

With the quick instinct which is the natural reaction of a woman, she lifted her abbreviated skirt to see how far up the run had gone, then suddenly, as though realizing her position, laughed and dropped the skirt back into place.

Lester Leith said, "That's too bad. Just pick up the fragments of the plate, Miss Sanders, and I'll see what I can do with them."

She picked up the two segments of the plate and handed them to Leith, who took them in his left hand, still holding the frying pan in his right hand.

"Oh," he said, "this isn't bad."

Ora Sanders stepped forward, swiftly passing between Leith and the audience. A half second later, Leith gave his left hand a deft twist, and there was the plate unbroken and apparently none the worse for having been dropped.

"Now," Lester Leith said, "we'll put the egg into the plate."

He tilted the frying pan and shook it.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

What came out of the frying pan was not a cooked egg, but a very fine pearl necklace which dangled for a moment on the lip of the frying pan, then dropped with a clatter to the plate which Leith was holding.

Leith dropped the frying pan, picked up the pearl necklace, and said, "What an egg!"

The audience applauded. Leith, as though the trick had been completed, turned back toward the table on which Ora Sanders was rearranging his stage properties.

For a long moment Shogiro stood rigid, the smile frozen on his face. Then he took a quick step toward Leith and said, "Begging honorable pardon, but that is my necklace!"

Leith turned to face him, urbanely smiling, holding the necklace in his hand. "Certainly it's your necklace," he said, and handed it to the Japanese.

Shogiro took the necklace, stared at it for a moment, then said ominously, "Begging honorable pardon, but this is not same necklace which came from frying pan."

Leith looked at it and said, "By George, I don't believe it is! It does seem different."

"It is different," Shogiro said. "Begging pardon, this necklace very cheap. Other necklace my property."

Leith said, "Well, there's only one thing for us to do then, and that's put the necklace in the frying pan, and see if we can change it back into the original necklace."

He dropped the necklace into the frying pan, shook it for a moment, then snatched up the plate which Miss Sanders had placed on the table. He tilted the frying pan over the plate—and what came out was not a necklace, but apparently an omelette.

"Tut, tut," Lester Leith said, "I'm afraid we dropped the necklace into those eggs, and we now have a pearl omelette. Here. I'll wrap it up in a handkerchief, and you can take it with you."

He picked up a silk handkerchief, placed it over the plate, apparently wrapped up the omelette, and handed it to Shogiro.

Shogiro took the handkerchief. He shook it out. It was empty. The plate was empty. With quick, purposeful strides, Shogiro walked over to the table and snatched up the frying pan. It too was empty.

The audience roared.

Leith, smiling broadly, bowed to the right and left, marking the termination of the act.

Shogiro, standing ominously tense, watched him for several seconds, then without a word turned and walked back to his seat.

Leith looked over the audience. Mah Foy was no longer in the front row, and Silman Shore seemed to have vanished as completely as had the omelette in the handkerchief.

Sergeant Ackley and Beaver sat in their stateroom staring moodily at each other.

"Well," Beaver said, "there it is."

Sergeant Ackley said, "It's plain as the nose on your face. Shogiro

excellent idea for you to be with the purser, and you'll kindly tell Ora Sanders to hunt up the first mate who has been so attentive to her and spend about an hour with him."

Mah Foy thought for a moment. "How about Scuttle?"

Leith grinned and said, "Let Scuttle be wherever he pleases."

"And you?" she asked.

Leith smiled. "I think," he said, "that I'll have some business with the captain."

Mah Foy said very gently, "That first necklace—as I glimpsed it hanging on the edge of the frying pan—seemed to be the Empress Dowager's necklace."

"Did it indeed?" Leith said smiling. "An excellent example of optical illusion."

She said, "My first loyalty is to my country. I warn you."

Leith smiled at her. "I wouldn't want it to be otherwise," he said.

It was a calm day with no wind. The sharp prow of the Monterey hissed through the water. Passengers, promenading the spotless decks or sprawled lazily in deck chairs, relaxed to the joys of ocean travel.

Katiska Shogiro paced the deck alone. His short, stubby legs propelled his torso with short, vigorous steps. His lips were no longer smiling. When Silman Shore stepped out of the smoking room to lounge against the rail, Shogiro saw him and stopped beside him.

"Excussse pleassse," he said. "You are recollecting last night?"

"What about it?" Shore asked.

"Pardon intrusion upon your honorable thoughts, but did you notice necklace which came from frying pan?"

Shore snapped his fingers. "Bosh!"

"Not bosh," Shogiro insisted. "I am particularly calling attention to necklace which you saw on night of Sansone dinner. Is not look the same?"

"I didn't even look at it," Shore said impatiently. "I hate all that kindergarten stuff. The minute he started pulling that old hokum. I got up and walked out."

"Thanking you very much," Shogiro said, and resumed pacing the deck, but this time his forehead was creased in a definite frown.

Charles Sansone sought out Leith.

"You'll pardon me," he said, "for intruding. I haven't met you. My name's Sansone. I was a very interested spectator at your performance last night."

Leith shook hands and said, "I'm very glad to know you. I'm afraid my performance was rather crude, but then, when persons are traveling on shipboard, any form of spontaneous entertainment is interesting."

"I was particularly interested in one phase of your performance," Sansone said.

"Indeed. What was that?"

"When you made the necklace come out of the frying pan."

Leith laughed deprecatingly. "I'm afraid," he said, "I can't explain how that was done."

"I don't want to know how it was done," Sansone said. "I want to know where you got that necklace."

Leith said, laughing, "You didn't think it was composed of genuine pearls, did you?"

"I didn't know," Sansone said. "It looked very much like a necklace I saw at one time. I don't know whether you've read about it or not." "Read about it?" Leith asked.

"Yes. A necklace which was stolen from Mr. Shogiro—unfortunately at a dinner where I was the host."

"Oh!" Leith exclaimed.

"I'm rather surprised at your surprise," Sansone told him dryly, "inasmuch as you have engaged the young woman who was formerly my secretary, and have apparently cultivated at least a speaking acquaintance with Shogiro."

"Just what are you getting at?" Leith asked. "As far as the necklace is concerned, it was a part of the stage properties which I use in my act."

"Doesn't it impress you as being a remarkable coincidence," Sansone asked, "that a stage property which you acquired at a house dealing in parlor magic would be almost an exact duplicate of a pearl necklace which was worn by the Empress Dowager of China?"

"What the devil are you insinuating?"

Sansone got to his feet. "Nothing," he said, and then added significantly, "as yet. I'm something of a magician myself."

He bowed and walked away.

A deck steward made the rounds of the deck, tapping on the ship's xylophone, and calling out, "Trapshooting on the afterdeck, please. An exhibition of trapshooting by a national champion."

Passengers started getting up from chairs, stretching, yawning, and drifting toward the stern. After a while, the popping of a gun

could be heard as blue rocks sailed out over the water, only to vanish into puffs of powder as a charge of well-directed shot struck them.

Silman Shore seemed rather bored by what he was doing. His manner was that it was kindergarten stuff.

Bang! Bang!

There wasn't a single miss.

At length, Shore finished, acknowledged the applause, placed his gun under his arm, and turned back toward his stateroom.

Charles Sansone, walking along the deck, said, "Just a word with you, Shore, if you don't mind."

The two men talked together in low tones for about fifteen minutes. Together they strolled back to the cabin occupied by the trapshooter. Shore's eyes were narrowed in thoughtful consideration.

"By George," he said, with his hand on the knob of the door, "it doesn't seem possible. Of course, I know some of these gem thieves are pretty slick, but—"

He opened the door and stood on the threshold in dismay. His cabin was a complete mess. Trunks had been opened and the contents of the drawers dumped on the floor. Clothes had been jerked from hangers in the closet and thrown to the far end of the stateroom. Some of the leather bags had actually been cut in an attempt to expose false bottoms.

Sansone said, "What's this?"

Shore said, "I've evidently been robbed."

He entered the stateroom, walked rapidly across to one of the open drawers, took out a roll of currency and a book of travelers' checks. He faced Sansone significantly. "The one who did it," he said, "wasn't looking for money."

Sansone said, "Come on. We're going to see the captain."

The captain received them in his stateroom, said, "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I wonder if you're acquainted with Mr. Leith, our amateur magician."

Leith was sitting in one of the leather-cushioned chairs.

"You're damn right we're acquainted with him," Sansone said. "He broke into Shore's cabin and—well, he stole—"

"Just a minute," the captain interrupted. "Who did you say stole what?"

"Mr. Leith-that is-"

"When was this done?" the captain asked.

Shore said, "Sometime in the last half hour. It is now 2:35. I left my cabin at two o'clock. It was all right then."

The captain looked at his watch and said, "Mr. Leith has been with me for the last forty-five minutes. We chatted until two o'clock when the skeet shooting started. We walked back along the boat deck, saw some of the blue rocks being broken, then came back here, and sat down. Now then, if you gentlemen have anything to report, report it, but I'll thank you to refrain from making any unfounded accusations."

The men exchanged glances. Shore, somewhat crestfallen, said, "Well, someone broke into my cabin and wrecked it looking for something."

"I'll go with you," the captain said, "at once. You'll pardon me, Mr. Leith?"

"Certainly," Leith said.

The three men walked off. A few moments later Leith strolled down to his own cabin. He opened the door, glanced inside, and then walked back down to where the captain was appraising the damage in Shore's stateroom. "Pardon me," he said. "I don't like to interrupt, but if you gentlemen think this cabin is a mess, come take a look at mine..."

The island of Oahu showed as a jagged outline against the sky. The ship, passing Koko Head, swung past Diamond Head and the beach at Waikiki.

A short time later the gangplank had been stretched and the passengers, many of them wearing garlands of fragrant leis made of vividly colored tropical flowers, surged down. Beaver said, "Just a minute, your hat, sir."

He took Leith's hat and brushed off an imaginary speck of dust. Surreptitiously pinning a small bow of white ribbon to the crown, he replaced the hat on Leith's head.

A moment later, Leith was swept down the gangplank. As he paused at the foot, a hand touched his shoulder and an official voice said, "One moment, please."

It was an hour later that Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a jubilant Beaver, walked into a jewelry store in Honolulu.

"We want this necklace of pearls appraised," Sergeant Ackley said. "In fact, you'd better appraise both of them."

The jeweler examined the necklaces, then he looked up at the two men.

"Well?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"Worth about five dollars," the jeweler said.

"For which one?" Beaver demanded.

"For both." the jeweler said.

Stunned, the two conspirators looked at each other, then silently took their spoils to another jewelry store. The jeweler studied the pearls under a magnifying glass, and was even less flattering in his appraisal. "About two dollars apiece." he said.

Leith lolled in the reclining chair on the lanai of his suite in the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and glanced out over Waikiki Beach where tourists and beach boys were hissing their way into shore on surfboards.

"This," he said, "is the life."

"Yes, sir," the undercover man observed.

Leith said, "By the way, Scuttle, I ordered a gun today."

"A gun, sir?"

"Yes," Leith said, "a shotgun. I think I may run over to one of the other islands and get in a little shooting. It's rather an expensive gun. I think prices went up because of this international trapshooting contest which is being staged tomorrow. By the way, Scuttle, you'll never guess whom I met this afternoon."

"Who?" the undercover man asked.

"Sergeant Ackley."

"What's he doing over here?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Leith said, "but seeing him has made the Islands suddenly distasteful to me. I've booked passage on the Clipper tomorrow. I'll fly back to the Mainland. Ah, there's a ring at the door. It must be the shotgun."

"You'll hardly be using the shotgun if you're flying back to the Mainland," the undercover man said. "Shall I tell them to take it back?"

"No, no," Leith said. "I told them I'd buy it, and I'll buy it. I'm a man of my word, Scuttle."

The undercover man signed a delivery slip and took it to Leith.

"Quite a beauty, isn't it?" Leith said.

"Indeed it is," the undercover man said worriedly. "Did Sergeant Ackley know you had seen him?"

"Oh, yes," Leith said. "I shook hands with him-although he seemed to want to avoid me. He said he'd been over here for two or three weeks, conferring with the local police department on a forgery case."

The valet started to speak, then checked himself . . .

The Clipper took off for the Mainland with roaring motors, the hull dripping globules of water which scintillated like diamonds in the sun.

Lester Leith waved goodbye to his valet.

That afternoon Silman Shore met an embarrassing defeat in the international skeet shoot, following which he was seen to inspect the gun he had found in his gun case; but he made no comment.

Katiska Shogiro, watching him with glittering eyes, was heard

to break into a sudden string of Japanese expletives.

At 5 o'clock that night, Mah Foy sailed for China. In her purse was a certified check signed by Lester Leith. It bore the words, "Donation to the Chinese cause—less 20 per cent for costs of collection."

It was a week after Beaver's return by passenger ship that Lester Leith, seated in his apartment, heard the sound of authoritative knuckles.

The door opened even before Leith could signal his valet. Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a uniformed officer, Charles Sansone, and Silman Shore, entered the apartment.

"Well, well," Leith said. "Good evening, gentlemen, we seem to be renewing a pleasant shipboard acquaintance. Did you come for—"

Sergeant Ackley said, "We came to make an investigation."

"Of what?" Leith asked.

"You purchased a shotgun while you were in Honolulu?"

"That's right," Leith said.

"Mr. Shore's shotgun was stolen while he was in the hotel in Honolulu. He feels that perhaps, in some unaccountable manner, the thief might have switched shotguns. He wants to see the shotgun which you took away with you on the Clipper."

"Indeed," Leith said, his eyes narrowing. "I think I've had all of Mr. Shore's veiled accusations I care for. If he wishes to make a charge, he can make it in the regular way—and he'd better be prepared to substantiate it."

"I'm not doing this," Shore said sullenly. "It's the sergeant who's

responsible."

"Indeed," Leith said, arching his eyebrows. "I'm surprised, Sergeant."

"You needn't be," Sergeant Ackley said. "Just bring out that shotgun."

"I'm afraid that's impossible."

"We can get a search warrant," Sergeant Ackley said threateningly.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do you any good," Leith said.

"Don't stall," Sergeant Ackley accused. "You laid yourself wide open, Leith. The idea of a man carrying a shotgun with him on the Clipper!"

Leith smiled. "It was rather a foolish thing to do," he said. "Do you know, Sergeant, I became ashamed of myself. I found myself getting enthused when I saw Mr. Shore's performance on the Monterey, but after I had a chance to see the wonderful panorama of the Islands unfolded beneath the Clipper, as we flew over Oahu, I realized that I didn't want to indulge in any sport which would mean the taking of life... I waited until the ship was about halfway across, and then pitched that shotgun overboard."

"You threw it overboard!" Shore exclaimed.

"Exactly," Leith said, "and that's why a search warrant would do you no good, Sergeant."

The men exchanged glances. Shore said, "I guess that's all you want of me, Sergeant."

He turned and left the apartment.

A moment later, Charles Sansone silently followed.

Sergeant Ackley stood staring down at Leith. "Damn you," he said, "you had it all figured out. When you flashed that necklace in your exhibition of magic and Shogiro identified it, Shore got up and dashed to his stateroom. It's significant that he picked up his gun and inspected it. Later on, his stateroom was thoroughly searched by Shogiro, who had tumbled to what happened after he'd searched your stateroom and found nothing. That necklace wasn't concealed in either place!

"There was only one other place it could be, one thing which wasn't in the room when Shogiro searched it—and that was Shore's shotgun. By removing the plate in the end of the butt, there was a hollow where a necklace could easily have been concealed."

Leith blinked. "By George, Sergeant," he said, "a man could conceal a necklace there."

"Could and did," Sergeant Ackley said.

Leith lit a cigarette, then looked up at Sergeant Ackley with a disarming smile.

"Clever of you, Sergeant," he said. "Isn't it a shame you didn't think of it before?"

Leith said musingly, "And to think I pitched that gun overboard.

THE HAND IS QUICKER THAN THE EYE 189

Do you *really* think there was any chance the guns could have been substituted, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Ackley fumed.

"Tut, tut." Leith said. "You mustn't be that way, Sergeant. In your profession, it's easy to make mistakes. You must figure things on a give-and-take basis."

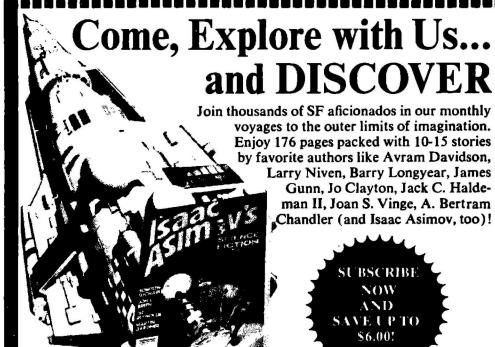
Sergeant Ackley's face was twisted with emotion. "Yes," he said, "and you do all the taking."

Following which, he left, slamming the door behind him with great violence.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE P.O. Box 2600 • Greenwich, CT 06836

	Send me 7 issue (a savings of \$1.48	s of EQMM for Only \$7.97! off the newsstand price)	
	Payment of \$	14 issues for \$15.94!	Outside U.S.A. and possessions: 7 issues \$9.16 14 issues \$18.33
	Card # Your Signature:	for \$15.94 can be charged to your ba	Expiration Date:
Your Addr	name		
City .		State Rease allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of file	Zip. rst issue. H1AAR
 - 	IT IS	HERE! A collection of ories to guarantee you entertainment.	twenty-one hours of
	E	SANTHO Vol. 40, Fall/Winter 1980 E	LOGY Edition
	Please Mail to: Ellery Queen's Mystery	☐ Enclosed is \$2.25 plus 65¢ sh handling (total \$2.90) for the Fa Winter '80 Vol. 40 Edition of Ellery Queen's Anthology.	

Detach here and return coupon to ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
Box 2650 • Greenwich, CT 06836
☐ 6 issues for just \$6.97 (I save over \$2.00) ☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me
☐ 12 issues for just \$13.94 (I save over \$6.00) ☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me
☐ Charge it to my ☐ VISA card ☐ Master Charge
Credit Card #
SignatureExpiration date
Outside U.S.A. & Possessions (cash or credit card only) 12 issues—\$16.00
Name (please print)
Address
CityStateZip
Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. H1AA02

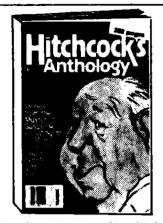


Every story and feature in ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE is reviewed by an editorial board according to Dr. Asimov's principles for good SF—so the fiction you get every month is always provocative, unusual, but with a sense of reality that makes you wonder. . . . "Could it be . . .?"

ORDER NOW!



27 Disquieting Stories—352 pages!



Please
mail to:
ALFRED
HITCHCOCK'S
ANTHOLOGY,
380 Lexington
Avenue,
NY, NY 10017

	plus 65¢ handling/shipping fall/Winter '80 Edition (Vol.
Name	
Address	
City	
State	ZIp

Order in advance of December 30th newsstand availability!

THE GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY ANALOG ANTHOLOGY

We proudly present a generous sampling of top quality stories from the first fifty years of ANALOG (formerly Astounding Science Fiction).

Don't miss this Collector's Item!

To: ANALOG ANTHOLOGY NO. 1 (Golden Anniversary Issue) 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017

Yes. Please send me ANALOG Anthology No. 1.

U	inclosed is \$2.95 plus 65¢ handling &	shipping (total \$3.60).
Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip

Mystery Lovers— Can You Solve This?

What famous mystery magazine regularly publishes top authors like these—Edward D. Hoch, Ruth Rendell, Julian Symons, Joyce Clu Harrington, Lawrence Treat, Stanley Ellin, Hugh Pentecost, George Baxt, Patricia McGerr, Lillian de la Torre—and more?



What is the world's largest-selling mystery magazine—now in its 40th year of publication?

What's one of the best values available—160 pages filled with the newest and the best—at least 12 new, never-before published stories by established favorites and rising newcomersplus a monthly Mystery Newsletter?

And you can have it all delivered to your home at a

special money-saving introductory price.





ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 2600 • Greenwich, CT 06836

	Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.
City_	StateZip
Addre	ess
ioui i	
Vour	name
	Your Signature:(Only the 14 Issues for \$15.94 can be charged to your bank cards.)
	Charge to my VISA Master Charge
	Payment of \$enclosed.
	Double my savings—14 issues for \$15.94! Outside U.S.A. and possessions:
	Send me 7 issues of EQMM for Only \$7.97! (a savings of \$1.48 off the newsstand price)

If your interest in crime · mystery · detection · · best-selling authors

is what we think it is ---- you should be reading

ELLERY QUEE



SEE OTHER SIDE FOR PECIAL OFFER



NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

First Class Permit No. 790 Greenwich, Conn.

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE P.O. Box 2600 Greenwich, Conn. 06835